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Course Guidebook

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Gregory S. Aldrete is the Frankenthal Professor of History and Humanistic Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay. He received his B.A. from Princeton University and his Ph.D. in Ancient History from the University of Michigan. His interdisciplinary scholarship spans the fields of history, archaeology, art history, military history, and philology.

Among the books Professor Aldrete has written or edited are *Gestures and Acclamations in Ancient Rome*; *Floods of the Tiber in Ancient Rome*; *Daily Life in the Roman City: Rome, Pompeii, and Ostia*; *The Long Shadow of Antiquity: What Have the Greeks and Romans Done for Us?* (with Alicia Aldrete); and *Reconstructing Ancient Linen Body Armor: Unraveling the Linothorax Mystery* (with Scott Bartell and Alicia Aldrete).

Professor Aldrete has won many awards for his teaching, including two national ones: He was named the Wisconsin Professor of the Year by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and he received the American Philological Association Award for Excellence in Teaching at the College Level (the national teaching award given annually by the professional association of classics professors). At the state level, he was selected from among all professors in the University of Wisconsin System to receive a System Regents Teaching Excellence Award, and his campus granted him its highest teaching award, the Founders Association Faculty Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Professor Aldrete's research has been honored with a number of fellowships, including two year-long humanities fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Solmsen Fellowship at the Institute for Research in the Humanities in Madison. Additionally, he was a fellow of two NEH seminars held at the American Academy in Rome and was a participant in an NEH institute at the University of California, Los Angeles. In 2014–2015, Professor Aldrete was the Martha Sharp Joukowsky Lecturer for the Archaeological Institute of America, for which he gave a series of public lectures across the United States.

Professor Aldrete's innovative Linothorax Project, in which he and his students reconstructed and tested ancient linen body armor, has garnered considerable attention from the media, having been featured in documentaries on the Discovery Channel, the Smithsonian Channel, and the National Geographic Channel and on television programs in Canada and across Europe. His research has also been the subject of articles in *U.S. News and World Report*, *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Der Spiegel* magazine, and *Military History* and of Internet news stories in more than two dozen countries.

Professor Aldrete's other Great Courses are *History of the Ancient World: A Global Perspective*; *The Decisive Battles of World History*; and *History's Great Military Blunders and the Lessons They Teach*. ■

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The Rise of Rome

The Roman Republic is one of the most famous and influential states in all of world history, and the story of its spectacular rise and disastrous fall has exerted an irresistible fascination for the last 2,000 years. Rome's contributions to art, architecture, law, language, religion, science, philosophy, and culture still surround and constantly affect us today. The unusual political structure of the Roman Republic has as served a model and a source of inspiration for others hoping to establish later republics that would seek to emulate ancient Rome's success. Among the more notable of these imitators are the creators of the Florentine Republic in the Renaissance, the Founding Fathers of the United States, and the 18th century French intellectuals who established a republic in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Rome's military triumphs have inspired generations of would-be conquerors, and the famed discipline and organization of its legions have provided models for countless later armies.

This course traces this history of the Roman Republic from its humble beginnings in the 8th century B.C. as an undistinguished cluster of mud huts beside the Tiber River until it reached its peak of power in the 1st century B.C., by which time it had established complete dominance over the entire Mediterranean basin. The central theme of the course is an investigation and analysis of the various factors that account for and explain its rise, including geography, cultural values, political structure, social structures, military strategy, leadership, and economic considerations. The very successes of the Roman Republic, however, also sowed the seeds of its eventual destruction by creating a set of tensions at the heart of Roman society itself that fostered resentment among its citizens, and a fatal destabilization of its institutions. The course thus also features a deep investigation of the underlying and proximate reasons for the collapse and ultimate fall of the Roman Republic.

In order to place this central narrative in context, it additionally includes an examination of the period of the Roman monarchy which preceded the republic, as well as various key aspects of Roman civilization, including religion, slavery, education, food, housing, employment, the art of rhetoric, and gender roles in Roman society. The chronological narrative of the course covers the foundation of the republic and the creation of its institutions, an account of the gradual expansion of Roman power throughout Italy, and Rome's unique policy toward the conquered Italians, which would play a vital role in its later successes. The course then presents Rome's explosion out of the Italian peninsula and the initiation of its takeover of the Mediterranean, beginning with the republic's dramatic battle to the death with its archrival, Carthage, led by the brilliant general Hannibal. This is followed by the conquest of Greece and the eastern Mediterranean, events which end up fundamentally transforming Rome through the infusion of vast wealth and, more importantly, by introducing Greek culture to Rome. Finally, we trace the history of the late Roman Republic, the turbulent period during which stresses undermined the republic even as it reached its peak of power. This era is also home to a sequence of some of the most famous and dynamic people in Roman history, including the dueling warlords Marius and Sulla; the ambitious, rulebreaking Pompey the Great; the superlative general and leader Julius Caesar; history's greatest orator, Cicero; the talented but flawed Mark Antony; Cleopatra, the clever Queen of Egypt; and the wily and manipulative politician Octavian. Each of these key figures is examined in detail, and their personalities, actions, and influence are explored.

This course presents a lively, engaging account of the rise and fall of the Roman Republic accompanied by insightful and in-depth investigations of the key factors and personalities that shaped its history. ■



THE CITY ON THE TIBER

LECTURE 1

Rome is arguably the most influential city in Western history. For over half a millennium, Rome dominated the Western world politically and militarily; and even when the empire fell and Rome lost its political hegemony, the city continued to be the seat of the Roman Catholic Church. In this lecture, you will consider the geographical, political, and cultural features of ancient Rome that contributed to the city's rise to prominence.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

- ◆ Let's say you were hypothetically planning to establish a city with the intent that it would one day conquer and dominate the entire Mediterranean. You could probably do a lot worse than placing it on the exact site where the city of Rome was actually founded. This location possessed a number of geographic advantages that would serve the Romans well over the course of their ascendancy.
- ◆ The Italian Peninsula, which famously resembles the shape of a boot, thrusts down from the north into the Mediterranean Sea at roughly the sea's midpoint. All maritime traffic between east and west has to funnel into the narrow straits between the toe of Italy and the island of Sicily, or else circle around between Sicily and North Africa.
- ◆ The city of Rome lies about halfway down the peninsula on its western side, along the banks of the Tiber River. Thus, by a gift of geography, Rome conveniently sits at a centralized location within Italy, from which it was well situated to eventually expand and dominate the peninsula; also, Italy itself is in a central position within the Mediterranean basin, and is similarly well placed to control the broader region.
- ◆ Two important mountain ranges which further define the Italian Peninsula played roles in Rome's history. To the north, the Alps lie across the top of the boot and separate Italy from Europe. Although pierced by a few passes, they are generally high and icy, and are a natural barrier hindering northern expansion, or—to look at it the opposite way—

helping to protect Italy from northern invasions. The second significant mountain chain is the Apennines. These form the spine of Italy, running the entire length the peninsula from north to south and dividing it in two.

- ◆ When we zoom in on the specific position of Rome within Italy, we find the city situated not at the mouth of the Tiber River but about 15 miles inland, at a point where there is an island in the middle of the river called, not very imaginatively, Tiber Island.



- ◆ The ford below Tiber Island formed a natural communication node within Italy. A second feature of the Tiber is that, up to Tiber Island, it is navigable. This meant that the site of Rome would have good access to the sea and to maritime trade and communication.
- ◆ The next important geographic feature present at Rome which made it an attractive site for settlement was a number of modest hills located close to the river crossing. These constituted defensive sites on which to build fortresses for protection. In addition, this particular point along the Tiber was prone to frequent floods, and the hills provided high ground to flee to when the waters rose.
- ◆ The two most important hills are the ones closest to the Tiber: the Capitoline and the Palatine. The Capitoline had fairly steep slopes, which made it a good stronghold from attackers. The Palatine, the central hill of Rome around which the others cluster, was important because it directly overlooked the crucial Tiber River crossing. An outpost on the Palatine could control traffic across the river at this point.
- ◆ Within the large central bend of the Tiber was a flat, marshy plain known as the Campus Martius. The Romans used this field for a wide variety of festivals and athletic events, as a place for soldiers to gather prior to going to war, and for citizens to cast their votes in elections.
- ◆ Rome possessed a number of geographical advantages, but those advantages alone are not enough to explain why it was Rome and not some other village that would grow and expand to dominate the Mediterranean. There were other cities, even within Italy, with comparable geographic characteristics. Still, geography helps, and Rome definitely occupied a promising location.

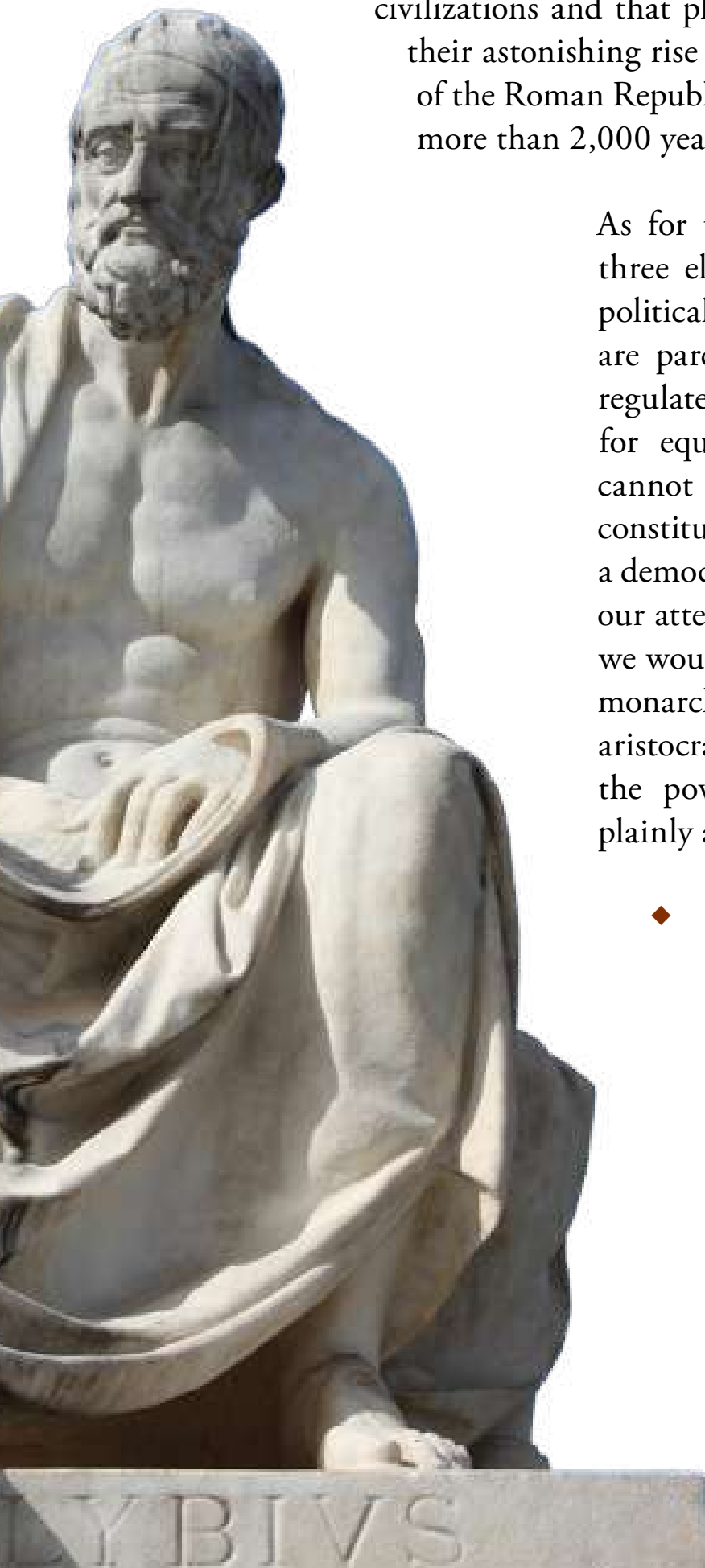


POLITICS NOT AS USUAL

- ◆ One factor that made the Romans different from all other civilizations and that played a key role in accounting for their astonishing rise was the unique political structure of the Roman Republic. The historian Polybius, writing more than 2,000 years ago, describes it this way:

As for the constitution of Rome, it has three elements, each of them possessing political powers. These respective powers are parceled out, and the whole system regulated with such a scrupulous regard for equality and equilibrium that one cannot say for certain whether the constitution on the whole is an aristocracy, a democracy, or a monarchy. If we focused our attention on the power of the consuls, we would be inclined to see the system as monarchical; if on the Senate, it seems an aristocracy; and finally, if one considers the power possessed by the people, it plainly appears to be a democracy.

- ◆ Polybius is describing what today we might term a mixed constitution: a political system in which power is divided among different branches of government, which themselves are controlled by different groups within society.



- ◆ There is more to Polybius's analysis, however. According to him, not only did the Roman Republic cleverly divide political power among its three branches of government, but the three components were also bound together in a complex web of interdependency:

Whenever any one of the three branches becomes overbearing and displays an inclination to be contentious and encroach upon the others, the mutual interdependency of all three, and the possibility of the ambitions of any one of them being checked or blocked by the others, then curbs this tendency. And so, the proper equilibrium is always maintained.

- ◆ To Polybius, this was the secret strength of the Roman Republic—that its political structure managed to capture the best elements of three different forms of government, and fuse them together into a dynamic but balanced whole. One can debate just how accurate Polybius's assessment of the Roman constitution was, but in a world in which the current and previous states were mostly monarchies and aristocracies with a smattering of democracies, there was indeed something unusual about the structure of the Roman Republic.

CULTURAL IMPACT

- ◆ We in the modern world continue to be affected by the culture of the ancient Romans. This lasting influence can be seen in the language with which we communicate, as a large percentage English words derive from Latin; in the laws by which we organize our society, as the majority of the world's legal systems are based on Roman law; and even in how we tell time, as our calendar is almost identical to the one developed by the Romans.
- ◆ Even the buildings of ancient Rome cast a long shadow. The Flavian Amphitheater—commonly known as the Colosseum—is the direct ancestor of all modern sports arenas, and the Pantheon, with its colonnaded facade and triangular pediment fronting a large dome, is the architectural inspiration for government buildings and museums



around the world. Likewise, the humble but all-important engineering infrastructure of the modern industrialized world can trace its origins directly to Roman sewers, aqueducts, roads, and bridges.

- ◆ Rome has come to represent many different concepts and stereotypes, both positive and negative. The Roman Republic has at times been held up as an ideal form of government, but it is also cited as an example of a system that harbored divisive, and ultimately self-destructive, values and institutions. Similarly, commentators have looked to Roman culture as a model of inclusiveness, efficient pragmatism, and streamlined administration, but it is also condemned for its cruelty, inequality, and oppression.

- ◆ On one hand, Rome boasted enormous and spectacular buildings that were marvels of engineering and that were adorned with a stunning profusion of sumptuous decoration. The city was the focal point of opportunity, wealth, culture, and luxury. On the other hand, Rome is often viewed as a place that was corrupt, decadent, crowded, filthy, and dangerous, with rampant poverty, crime, and disease. One way or another, however, Rome has both served as a reference point and occupied a central place in the imaginations of every generation that has followed.

Suggested Reading

Boatwright, Gargola, and Talbert, *The Romans*.

Everitt, *The Rise of Rome*.

Walbank, *Polybius*.

Ward, Heichelheim, and Yeo, *A History of the Roman People*.

Questions to Consider

- ✦ How great an advantage do you think the location of Rome gave it, and which geographical feature of the site do you think was most helpful or useful to the Romans?
- ✦ Do you think Polybius's unusual combination of being a Greek who was a victim of Roman imperialism but also had befriended some of the most powerful Romans makes him more or less objective when it comes to writing the history of Rome, and why?



THE MONARCHY AND THE ETRUSCANS

LECTURE 2

For the Romans, everything begins with Rome, and Roman history itself begins with the date traditionally ascribed to the city's foundation—April 21, 753 B.C. Despite the great importance attached to the foundation of Rome, it is difficult to determine what really happened; no contemporary account survives, and later ones are heavily weighted with propagandistic purposes. This lecture examines the incredible accounts of this early period in Roman history.

FOUNDATION MYTHS

- ◆ Archaeological evidence tells us that the site of Rome was inhabited hundreds of years before the city's supposed foundation; there are graves in the area from at least 1000 B.C. However, the archaeological evidence also suggests that, starting from around 700 B.C., close to the legendary foundation date, the population did start to increase rapidly. From there, the first signs of major urban structures in stone begin to appear.
- ◆ The Romans themselves told many stories about their city's establishment. In some cases, the stories conflict with one another. But over time, several figures came to dominate these accounts. The first of these focuses on Aeneas, who appears as a minor character in Homer's epic poem the *Iliad*.
- ◆ Aeneas was allegedly the son of a Trojan prince and the goddess Aphrodite. When Troy was destroyed by the Greeks, he managed to escape the destruction and flee the burning city, disappearing into the wilderness. That is as far as his legend goes in Greek tradition. The Romans, however, saw an opportunity to co-opt this missing hero from Greek culture for their own propagandistic purposes.
- ◆ As memorialized by the Roman poet Virgil in his masterpiece, the *Aeneid*, after escaping Troy, Aeneas wandered around the Mediterranean having various adventures until he eventually washed ashore in Italy. There, he married a local girl from one of the Latin tribes. Aeneas's descendants would found the city of Rome, and thus Aeneas is credited as being the forefather of the Roman people.



- ◆ Aeneas's son, Iulus, was said to be the progenitor of one of the most eminent families in later Roman history, the Julii. This was the family of such illustrious figures as Julius Caesar and Augustus, the first emperor. By asserting that they were descended from Iulus, the Julii also laid claim to divine lineage, because Iulus's grandmother was the goddess Aphrodite.
- ◆ The second important foundation story tells how the city of Rome itself began, and focuses on twin brothers named Romulus and Remus. One of the descendants of Iulus became king by the duplicitous means of expelling his brother and murdering his brother's children. He then forced his brother's daughter to become a Vestal Virgin to ensure that she would have no children who might seek revenge against him.

- ◆ The Vestal Virgin became pregnant, however, and claimed that she had been raped by Mars, the god of war. She gave birth to twins, Romulus and Remus. Because of their possibly divine parentage, the king was afraid to kill the babies directly, so he had them put in a basket and thrown into the Tiber River to drown.
- ◆ The Tiber was in flood at the time, and the basket was eventually deposited by the floodwaters on the slopes of the Capitoline Hill. The babies were found by a she-wolf who nursed them and looked after them with the help of a woodpecker. Ultimately, the boys were discovered by a shepherd, who raised them as his own. In time, the shepherd revealed the secret of their birth, and they overthrew the king.



- ◆ Having established their archetypal hero credentials by being exposed as infants, once grown to adulthood, Romulus and Remus decided to establish a new city on the spot where the wolf had rescued them. Almost immediately, they got into an argument over who should be the king of the new city. They were twins, after all, and did not know which one of them was older.
- ◆ Romulus and Remus could not agree, so they opted to let the gods choose the king. To do this, each brother went to the top of one of the hills and looked for a sign, with Romulus standing on the Palatine Hill. Remus received the first sign when six vultures flew overhead. Shortly afterward, however, 12 vultures flew over Romulus.
- ◆ This left the brothers still arguing, with each claiming the gods had picked him—Remus saying he had the first omen and Romulus saying he had the better omen. In the end, they couldn't settle their differences and, growing angry, Romulus solved the problem by murdering his brother. Thus Romulus became the first king of the city that came to bear his name.
- ◆ The earliest version we have of the Romulus and Remus story dates from 200 B.C. It therefore represents later mythologizing and, from a historical standpoint, is highly untrustworthy. Rome's foundation myths contain some important themes, however, and are revealing about the way the Romans viewed themselves.
- ◆ The focus of the stories is always on the city of Rome. The Aeneas myth provides links to Greek civilization and culture and positions Rome within a larger context. The Romulus story is an unusual foundation legend because it places a fratricide as the event which began Roman history. It also introduces the theme of powerful men fighting each other to see who will control Rome, an idea that will recur many times throughout Roman history.

THE RAPE OF THE SABINE WOMEN

- ◆ Conventionally, Roman history is divided into three distinct eras according to the type of government in place at the time. The first of these was the monarchy, when Rome was ruled by kings. This period begins with Romulus in 753 B.C., and it continues until the expulsion of the last of the kings in 509 B.C.
- ◆ The Romans claimed to have had only seven kings, which seems improbable given the length of time that the monarchy was supposedly in power. In fact, the entire period of the monarchy is shrouded in uncertainties, and much of it still falls under the category of myth rather than history.
- ◆ One of the first great problems confronting Romulus was a very practical concern—he and his followers were nearly all men, and for obvious reasons, if they wanted their city to have a future, they needed women. His solution was to invite one of the neighboring tribes, called the Sabines, to a big feast in the new city. The curious Sabines agreed to come. During the festivities, a signal was given at which point the Romans all tried to grab a young Sabine woman and run off with her. This event became known as the rape of the Sabine women.
- ◆ The Sabines were understandably unhappy that their daughters had been kidnapped by the Romans, so they attacked Rome. The Romans barricaded themselves on top of the Capitoline Hill, with the angry Sabines surrounding them below. The Sabine and Roman men were about to start fighting and killing each other, when suddenly, the kidnapped Sabine women ran between the two groups, stopping the battle.
- ◆ Despite their initial abduction, enough time had passed that the Sabine women had seemingly begun to fall in love with their Roman abductors. They pleaded with the men not to fight, saying that the Sabine women would lose no matter what happened; if the Romans won, it would mean that their fathers and brothers had been killed, and if the Sabines won, it would mean that their husbands had been killed.

- ◆ At this plea, the Romans and Sabines agreed to make peace, and, what's more, to combine their two peoples together. The new state would be ruled by Romulus and the Sabine king jointly. Whatever the truth of this story, it provides a precedent for two important aspects of Roman culture: Rome's assimilation with its neighbors, and the presence of dual magistrates.

ETRUSCAN INFLUENCES

- ◆ Most of the legendary kings of Rome seem to have Roman or Sabine names, but at least the last two clearly had Etruscan ones. At this time, the

Etruscans were a thriving, sophisticated civilization

that dominated the northern half of the

Italian peninsula. The fact that the last Roman kings bear Etruscan names has usually been interpreted to mean that, at some point, the growing village of Rome came to the attention of its Etruscan neighbors, and that the Etruscans imposed their rulership on the Romans.

- ◆ Recently, some scholars have questioned the idea of Rome falling under Etruscan control, pointing out, for example, archaeological evidence suggesting that by this time, Rome was probably larger and possibly more powerful than any contemporary Etruscan city. Whichever interpretation is correct, it is certain that the Etruscans would exert influence on Roman culture, and so it is worth looking at them in more detail.



- ◆ The Etruscans have long been described as mysterious, and they are hard to fully understand for a number of reasons. One is the longstanding debate about their origins. Some argue that the Etruscans came from the Middle East; others that they arose in Italy. Scholars—and now scientists, using DNA testing—have not yet reached an agreement on this issue.
- ◆ Another element of mystery is the Etruscan language, a non-Indo-European one that had fallen out of use by the mid-1st century A.D. Because the Etruscans adopted an alphabet based on the Phoenician one, we can read their words; we do not always know what those words mean, however, and the majority of Etruscan inscriptions consist of proper names.
- ◆ A pronounced degree of social stratification seems to have developed in the Etruscan communities, with the emergence of a dominant aristocratic class. Starting in the late 8th century B.C., some of the towns in southern Etruria rapidly evolved from clusters of thatch-roofed clay huts into genuine city-states.
- ◆ Wealthy Etruscans soon came to live in sturdy, rectangular structures of brick or stone with terra-cotta-tiled roofs. There are signs of urban planning and standard civic features, such as streets, drainage channels, walls, fortifications, and religious sanctuaries. The Etruscan city-states do not seem to have been united politically, and they often fought with one another and competed for trade.
- ◆ Contact with the Phoenicians and the Greeks brought an influx of ideas and artistic styles, as well as a new alphabet. The Etruscans liked to adopt and adapt foreign influences. The Etruscan elites imported luxury goods from overseas, which they used to project a sense of their social status and power.
- ◆ The political structure of Etruscan civilization seems to have been a confederation of strong, rich cities. Their kings were important figures. They served as commanders of the army, high priests, and chief judges

and are depicted wearing purple robes and golden crowns. The robes of the Etruscan kings are thought to be the basis for the Roman toga, which would later become famous as the symbol for Roman citizenship.

- ◆ The Etruscans also seem to have been fond of public entertainments, including chariot races and combats to the death, which were held as part of funeral ceremonies. It is apparently from the Etruscans that the Romans took the idea of gladiatorial contests, and chariot racing later became the most popular form of Roman public entertainment.
- ◆ Whether through outright political control or innocent cultural interaction, the influence of Etruscan civilization on the Romans was significant. Soon, however, the Romans would come into more direct conflict with their neighbors, ultimately eclipsing the Etruscans completely. This moment would spark a revolution in Rome, transforming the monarchy into a republic and launching the Romans on their path to domination of the Mediterranean.

Suggested Reading

Borrelli and Targia, *The Etruscans*.
Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*.
Grandazzi, *The Foundation of Rome*.
Spivey, *Etruscan Art*.

Questions to Consider

- ✦ Discuss the ways in which the Romulus/Remus foundation story is both typical and atypical of such foundation legends.
- ✦ Of the various aspects of culture that the Romans may have borrowed from or at least shared with the Etruscans, which do you believe are the most significant?



ROMAN VALUES AND HEROES

LECTURE 3

Perhaps the best way to gain insight into Roman culture is to examine what the Romans themselves identified as being the qualities of the ideal Roman. In terms of understanding them and their behavior, it matters less whether Romans in reality lived up to these standards, but rather how they wanted to appear to others. This lecture paints a portrait of the ideal Roman by examining stories of early Roman heroes, as recounted by the historian Livy.

MUCIUS SCAEVOLA

- ◆ Imagine that your nation is at war with a dangerous enemy. In order to save your country, you have volunteered to sneak into the enemy headquarters and assassinate their leader. Unfortunately, your attack fails. Worse, you are captured and dragged before the enemy king. He wants to obtain information about your country's plans but knows that you will not reveal the information willingly. Therefore, he decides to torture you to find out what you know, so he has a blazing urn of fire brought into the room. What would you do if faced with this desperate situation?
- ◆ According to Livy, this was exactly the plight that a young Roman named Mucius found himself in during one of the many wars in Rome's early history. Rather than be intimidated by the king's threat of torture, however, Mucius found a way to psychologically turn the tables on his captor. According to Livy's account, Mucius boldly declared:

I am a Roman citizen. My name is Gaius Mucius. I came here to kill my enemy and I am not afraid to die. Romans know both how to act with bravery and how to show bravery in suffering. I am the first to attempt to kill you, but I will not be the last, because there are many others like myself who will take up my mission. Therefore, prepare yourself to live in danger, to fear for your life every hour of the day. ... Watch me and learn how unimportant the body is to those who have dedicated themselves to a greater cause.

- ◆ At the conclusion of this proud statement, “Mucius thrust his right hand into the flames and held it there. As the flesh burned from his bones, Mucius gave no sign that he felt anything.” Upon seeing this unbelievable display of willpower, the king was so astonished—and so intimidated by Mucius’s fanaticism—that he released Mucius and ended the war, wisely preferring not to fight against a nation of such formidable opponents.
- ◆ To honor his deed, the Romans bestowed a new name upon Mucius—one that would be passed down to his descendants, serving for all eternity to remind them and everyone who interacted with them of his sacrifice. From then on, he was known as Mucius Scaevola, which can be loosely translated as “Mucius the Lefty.”



- ◆ In the value system Mucius embodies, the individual is much less important than the group. This Roman emphasis on the good of the state trumping the good of the individual sharply contrasts with the earlier Homeric Greek value system, embodied by figures such as Achilles, in which the paramount virtue was personal glory.
- ◆ Mucius also demonstrates the qualities of cleverness and resourcefulness. Even after his mission apparently fails, he uses his mind to find a way out of a seemingly hopeless situation and to intimidate the enemy king into making peace, thus achieving his overall purpose through unexpected means.
- ◆ Finally, he demonstrates a superhuman degree of willpower and determination when he voluntarily burns off his own hand. This is the crucial moment of the story, and it is this act, more than anything else, that elevates Mucius beyond the ranks of ordinary citizens to heroic status.

CINCINNATUS

- ◆ The majority of the accounts in Livy focus on youthful action heroes, but there are several well-known stories whose protagonists display a more complicated or nuanced set of societal values. One of these concerns an older man, a retired general named Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus.
- ◆ Cincinnatus lived in the 5th century B.C. at a time when Rome had only recently overthrown its monarchy and become a Republic. The experience of living under kings had left the Romans with a deep-seated hatred of any one man having absolute power. Under their new political system, the Romans went to great lengths to spread political authority among a variety of individuals and institutions.
- ◆ The Romans were a very practical people, however, and they realized that in moments of extreme danger when the state itself was threatened with complete destruction, it was necessary to put a single person with absolute power in charge in order to enable swift and decisive action. When such a person was appointed, he was called a dictator, and his term was strictly limited to no longer than six months.

- ◆ In Livy's account, an enemy army had invaded Roman territory and succeeded in trapping the Roman army. The capture of the army would have resulted in the destruction of the Roman state, so in this time of emergency, the Senate determined that a dictator was needed. They selected the retired general Cincinnatus, and a delegation of the Senate was sent to inform him.
- ◆ They found the old warrior hard at work on his tiny, three-acre farm. Cincinnatus put on his toga, accepted the appointment to the dictatorship, and quickly organized the Roman defenses. Through a series of brilliant maneuvers, he completely defeated the enemy and rescued the surrounded Roman army. Although Cincinnatus had been granted the dictatorship for a period of six months, he resigned after only 16 days.
- ◆ The key moment in this story is the one at the very end: After winning his victory and saving the state, Cincinnatus was beloved by everyone and at the height of his popularity. He was also still dictator, and he therefore possessed absolute power over the Roman state and everything and everyone in it.
- ◆ One might naturally assume that this would be the sort of position most people would aspire to and would want to savor as long as possible—loved by all and wielding total control. Cincinnatus, however, chose to defy this expectation, and instead of enjoying the power and fame that he had, after all, deservedly won through his own talent and efforts, he voluntarily resigned from the dictatorship and returned to his farm.
- ◆ Why would Cincinnatus give up fame, power, and fortune in exchange for obscurity, poverty, and hard work? The main answer, of course, is that he exemplifies the Roman Republican attitude of being uncomfortable with one person having too much political authority, even if that one man is himself.
- ◆ Both for the Romans and for later civilizations, Cincinnatus became the paradigm for a type of altruistic behavior that was perhaps more ideal than reality—that talented individuals should use their gifts for the benefit and glory of the state, and not seek reward or fame for themselves.



- ◆ Cincinnatus also embodies the concept of the citizen/soldier/farmer, a concept absolutely central to the Romans' image of themselves. The perfect Roman was a man like Cincinnatus: in times of peace, a hard-working, self-sufficient farmer; in times of war, a tough and hardened soldier; and at all times, an honest and engaged citizen. How often and to what degree reality differed from this ideal is less significant than the fact that the ideal existed, and that men like Cincinnatus were constantly being cited as role models to be emulated.

HORATII AND CURIATII

- ◆ Another story from Livy involves another war between Rome and its neighbors—this time, the Albans. Because the two sides are so evenly matched, each realizes that the war will be very destructive to both the winner and the loser. They therefore agree to hold a combat between three warriors from each side, with the result to determine the outcome of the war.
- ◆ As chance would have it, in each of the armies there happened to be a trio of brothers, all renowned for their skill and strength. The triplets on the Alban side were called the Curiatii, and those on the Roman, the Horatii. On the day appointed for the duel, the feuding armies encamped on opposite sides of a field and the two sets of triplets strode into the open space between them.



- ◆ At first, they were evenly matched. After a few moments of combat, however, the tide turned sharply against the Romans. Two of the Roman Horatii were killed, although all three of the Alban Curiatii incurred slight wounds. Now it was three Curiatii against the lone remaining brother of the Horatii.
- ◆ Although badly outnumbered, Horatius had one thing in his favor: He was uninjured, whereas each of the Curiatii had a minor wound. Seeing in this a chance, he began to run, and the Curiatii set off in pursuit. As the chase progressed, however, the three Curiatii became spaced out wider and wider, as each was only able to run as quickly as his particular injury allowed.
- ◆ Once a sizable gap opened up between the first two Curiatii, the remaining Horatii brother suddenly spun around and engaged the foremost of the Curiatii. In this one-on-one battle, the uninjured Roman had the advantage. He quickly slew the first of the Curiatii, then waited for the second to arrive. By the time the third and most severely wounded of the Curiatii labored onto the scene, the second had already been killed. The third soon followed.
- ◆ In this story, we see on display the by now familiar Roman virtues of bravery and willingness to sacrifice yourself for your country. In addition, the victor displayed resilience in not giving up when things seemed to be going badly, and ingenuity in coming up with a successful strategy.
- ◆ While almost all of Livy's stories focus on male heroes, this particular tale has an interesting postscript which indicates some expectations for behavior for Roman women. After receiving the acclamation of his peers, as was customary, the surviving one of Horatii stripped the arms and armor off the men he had killed, and then set off triumphantly for home, bearing these bloody trophies.

- ◆ As fate would have it, the sister of the victorious Horatii happened to be engaged to marry one of the slain Curiatii. When she recognized in her brother's hands the blood-stained cloak of her fiancé—a cloak she had woven herself and given as a gift to her lover—she understandably burst into tears.
- ◆ Her brother was so enraged by her display of grief, which marred his own victory and glory, that he drew his sword and stabbed her to death. As he did so, he shouted, “Go then to your betrothed, ... forgetful of your dead brothers, of the one who still lives, and of your country! Let every Roman woman who mourns for an enemy be punished in this way!”
- ◆ Horatius was put on trial for the murder of his sister, but after a speech by his father defending his actions, he was acquitted by popular acclaim. Both Horatius's words and the outcome of the trial make it quite clear where the priorities lay for Roman women, who were expected to subsume their personal wishes and desires to the interests of their family and the state.

Suggested Reading

Livy, *History of Rome*.

Questions to Consider

- ✦ What social and cultural purposes are served by having shared stories of heroic figures? You may want to consider unity, identity, explanation, and values.
- ✦ How much do you think it matters whether stories about heroic or foundational figures are true or not?



THE EARLY REPUBLIC AND RURAL LIFE

LECTURE 4

Sometime around 500 B.C., Romans transformed their city from a monarchy, the traditional form of government in Rome and most other Italian cities up to that point, into the Roman Republic. Exactly how this crucial moment came about is shrouded in a dense accretion of later mythologizing and propaganda; nevertheless, the legends surrounding the republic's inception are worth considering for what they reveal about the core values by which Romans chose to define themselves.

THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA

- ◆ While nearly all of the stories about early Roman heroes recounted by the Roman historian Livy focus on men, one important story revolves around a Roman woman, named Lucretia. Her story involves a number of dramatic elements, including a contest of wives, a rape, and a suicide. Lucretia came to be a role model for Roman daughters, who learned her story from their parents.
- ◆ The king who ruled Rome at the time was Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, and he was of Etruscan origin. At least in the traditional view, the Romans had more and more come to resent being ruled over by what amounted to a foreign nobility. In spite of his name, which means “Tarquinius the Proud,” the king was purportedly arrogant and ruled by fear. He had several senators murdered, did not take advice from the Senate, and is otherwise depicted as conforming to the image of a tyrant.
- ◆ As Lucretia's tale begins, the Roman army is encamped around an enemy city, laying siege to it. A group of young Romans, including Tarquinius the Proud's son, who was named Sextus Tarquinius, were sitting around the campfire drinking and boasting. Each asserted that he had the best wife.
- ◆ Unable to resolve the argument, at last one of them hit on a solution to put the question to the test and determine whose wife was most virtuous. He urged them to ride back to Rome in the middle of the night, burst into their respective homes, surprise their wives, and see what they were up to while their husbands were away in the field fighting, stating that “The truest test of a wife is to return home unexpectedly and surprise her.”

- ◆ Being all rather drunk, they readily agreed to this plan, jumped on their horses, and rode back to Rome. To their disappointment, at house after house when they burst in, they found their wives eating, gossiping, and partying with their female friends—until they arrived at Lucretia’s house. They found Lucretia alone except for her servants, sitting and spinning cloth by the light of a single lamp. She was clearly the most virtuous wife, and won the contest.
- ◆ Unfortunately, her display of womanly virtue attracted an unwanted admirer. Sextus Tarquinius, the king’s son, became filled with a villainous lust for Lucretia. A few days later, he returned to Lucretia’s house alone. As befits an honored guest, Lucretia served him dinner, and let him stay in the guest room. When everyone was sound asleep, Tarquinius crept into Lucretia’s bedroom, and threatened to kill her unless she had sex with him. Despite this dire threat, Lucretia stoutly resisted his advances, stating that she would prefer death.
- ◆ Unable to overcome her with physical threats, Tarquinius switched tactics. He said that he would murder both her and one of her male slaves and place their naked bodies in bed together so that everyone would believe that she had been discovered committing shameful adultery. Threatened with this disgrace, Lucretia gave in. Tarquinius raped her, and then he left.
- ◆ Lucretia promptly sent a messenger to her husband and her father, instructing them to come at once and to each bring along a trustworthy friend. Her husband brought a man named Lucius Junius Brutus. When they arrived, she related what had happened, stating, “Only my body has been violated. My mind is free of guilt, as death will be my witness. Swear by your right hands and promise that the rapist will be punished. He is Sextus Tarquinius.”
- ◆ They all swore the oath and tried to comfort her, but she replied, “As for me, although I acquit myself of guilt, I do not absolve myself from punishment. Never let any unchaste woman live by citing me as an example.” She then took out a knife which she had kept concealed under her clothes and plunged it into her heart.

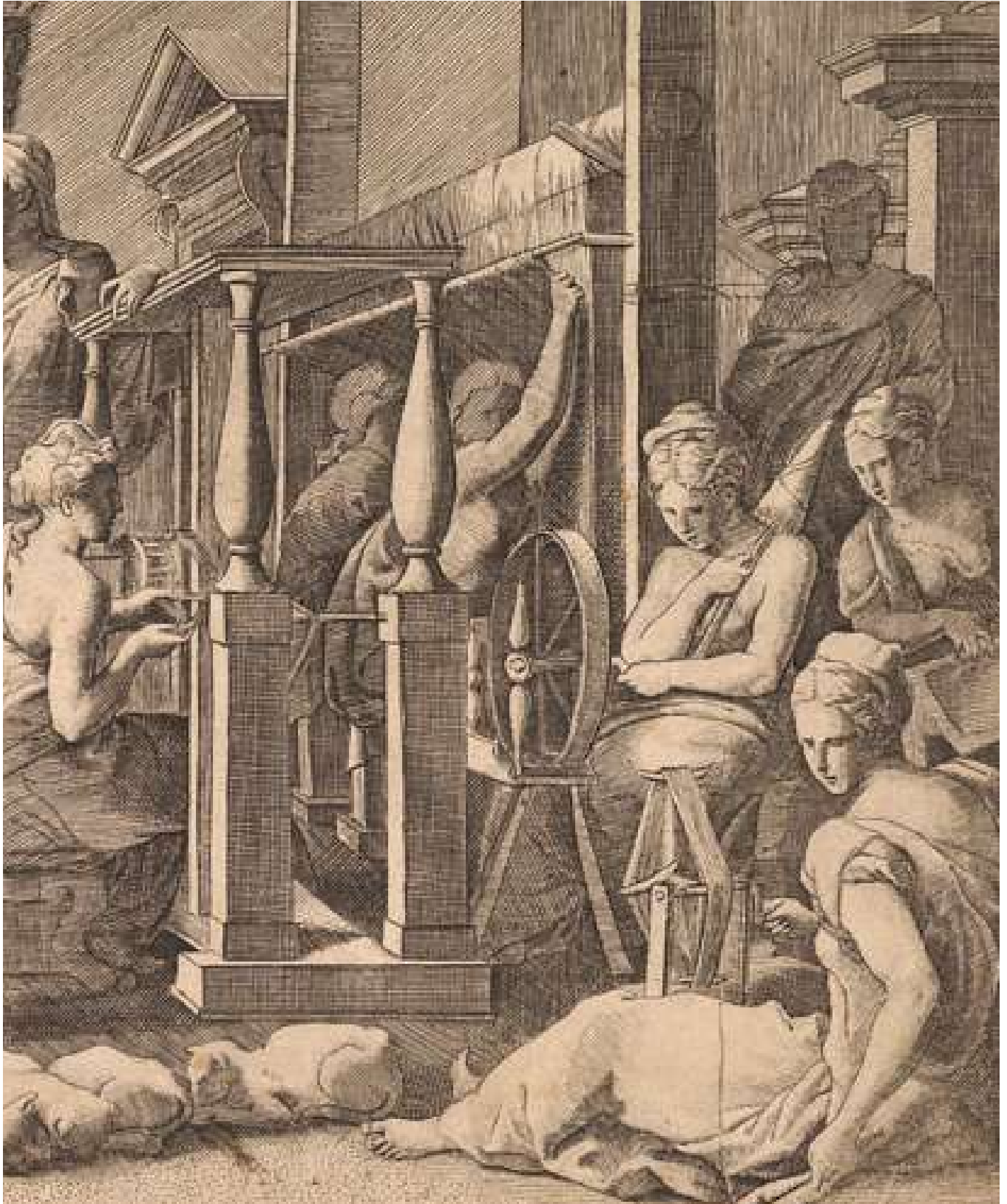


- ◆ Holding the dagger dripping with her blood up in the air, Brutus proclaimed: “I swear by this blood, most pure until a prince polluted it, and I call upon you, the gods, to witness my oath that I shall pursue Tarquinius the Proud, his evil wife, and all their children with fire, sword, and all other force I possess, and I will not allow them or anyone else to rule as king at Rome.”
- ◆ Brutus and the others present led a rebellion against the entire Tarquin family, ultimately expelling the Tarquins from Rome. The Romans then established the Roman Republic. Brutus was elected as one of its first consuls, or chief magistrates.

IDEALS AND IDEALISM

- ◆ In analyzing the story of Lucretia, it is useful to divide the story into two distinct parts: the contest of the wives, and the rape and the establishment of the republic. The first section, the contest of the wives, establishes Lucretia as the ideal of Roman womanhood. Whereas the other wives are discovered gossiping with one another and socializing, Lucretia is found in her own home industriously working and supervising the labor of her servants.
- ◆ It is particularly significant that what Lucretia is found doing is sewing. In the ancient world generally, one of the most important duties and economic contributions of women was to weave fabric and sew clothing. Even as far back as Homer's *Iliad*, skill at weaving was listed among the top criteria by which women were judged and for which they were valued.
- ◆ To the Romans, a woman's place was in her home; the fact that this is where Lucretia is found further attests to her superiority. It also speaks to her modesty, which was a much-praised quality in Roman women. Finally, Lucretia scorns socializing with other women in favor of hard labor for the benefit of her family.
- ◆ The second half of Lucretia's story features her displaying additional virtues. When threatened by Tarquinius with the choice of yielding to his lust or being killed, she unhesitatingly chooses death. In doing so, she demonstrates great courage. What eventually causes her to submit to Tarquinius is not the threat of bodily harm, but rather the fear that her honor will be disgraced if Tarquinius frames her. She thus shares with Roman men the ideal that one's reputation is even more important than one's life.
- ◆ After Tarquinius leaves, Lucretia summons her husband, informs him of her rape, and commits suicide. This is a troubling episode; even though she herself admits that she is not guilty, she punishes herself anyway. Her stated reason for this extreme action is telling—she does not want to provide a precedent for future unfaithful women to cite in order to escape punishment.

- ◆ She is thus represented as being self-consciously aware of her potential as a role model and an exemplar, and is determined to set the bar of moral rectitude as high as possible. Again, she is more concerned with protecting her reputation—and perhaps even more importantly, that of her husband and her family—than she is with preserving her own security and happiness.



- ◆ From a modern perspective, the fact that one of the main examples of behavior presented to young Roman girls for emulation involved a woman who is raped and commits suicide is rather disturbing. One characteristic shared by the accounts of male Roman heroes such as Mucius, Horatius, and Cincinnatus is that each is threatened with what looks like certain death, but in the end, all three survive and are showered with honors and rewards. Lucretia, the lone female protagonist, however, is the unlucky hero who actually dies rather than live happily ever after.
- ◆ This story probably reveals more about Roman males' fears and concerns, than it does about the behavior of actual Roman women. One can only speculate how the story might have been different if Roman women had been allowed to write their own accounts of female role models and heroines.
- ◆ Finally, in addition to offering moral instruction, Lucretia's tale also has vital significance in Roman history. The consequences of the famous oath taken by Brutus are the end of the monarchy and the creation of the republic. It is intriguing that this crucial moment in Roman history is prompted not by a man, but by a woman.
- ◆ While this story tells us a great deal about Roman values, it is far less certain how accurately it reflects the historical moment when the republic was formed. In reality, the transition from monarchy to republic was likely much less abrupt than this tale suggests. Many of the key institutions that are most associated with the republic, such as the Roman Senate and the division of citizens into voting groups, had, in fact, already been established during the monarchy.
- ◆ The government of Rome during the monarchy already had strong oligarchic elements, making it more of a system in which political power was wielded by an aristocratic elite rather than a true despotism. Conversely, during the republic, this aristocratic class still held a central role, making the republic less democratic than is often portrayed. The supposedly antimonarchical rebellion staged by Brutus and other Roman elites may actually have been more of a coup in which one aristocratic faction displaced another.

THE TWELVE TABLES

- ◆ A key moment in the development of the Roman Republic took place around 450 B.C. At that time, a special commission of 10 men was appointed and given extraordinary powers to create a code of laws. Two successive commissions in 450 and 451 ultimately came up with a legal code known as the Twelve Tables. As its name indicates, the code was inscribed on 12 bronze tablets, or tables, which were then set up in the Roman Forum.
- ◆ The Twelve Tables do not form a coherent legal system. Rather, they are a collection of separate laws regulating specific situations. The Roman legal code would continue to grow in complexity over the next millennium, eventually becoming a vast and sophisticated legal system on which most modern legal codes are based.
- ◆ The Twelve Tables of the early republic strongly reflect the concerns of contemporary Romans, and are clearly the product of an agrarian society in which most people were farmers and the basis of the economy was agriculture. It also is plainly a code developed by a society in which the family was the core social unit, and males, especially the father of the family, were granted enormous power and respect.
- ◆ The majority of the Twelve Tables deal with relatively mundane matters. For example, there are laws governing inheritance, marriage, divorce, debt, boundary disputes, and false witness. Many of the laws govern the petty sorts of conflicts that arise among farmers—what happens, for example, if fruit from one man's tree falls onto his neighbor's land and the neighbor's animals eat it.
- ◆ Like most other early legal codes, such as those of Hammurabi or the Old Testament, the Twelve Tables are retaliatory—if you harm someone else, that same harm is then done to you. It is a harsh code, and the punishment for many offenses is death. Even in this fairly simple first attempt at a legal code, however, there are some interesting distinctions made.

- ◆ For example, if a thief broke into your house at night or was armed, you were allowed to kill him; if the break-in occurred during the day and the thief was unarmed, you were supposed to summon your neighbors and apprehend him. Other interesting provisions include a law that punished using sorcery or magic to harm someone, and several statutes that set limits on how elaborate or expensive a funeral you could hold for a deceased relative.



- ◆ The emphasis in the Twelve Tables on laws related to farming reminds us just how much of an agrarian society early Rome really was. Around 90 percent of the Roman population lived in the countryside. If you were a typical Roman, the story of your life was that you were born on a family farm, you lived on the family farm, you tilled the soil, you probably never traveled more than 20 miles from your home, you married someone from a nearby farm, you ran your own farm, and you died on the farm.
- ◆ History books and documentaries tend to focus on city life because that is where everything happens. One can view civilization itself as primarily an urban phenomenon. Politics, government, religion, law, art, war, buildings, trade, literature—all of these happen in cities. While this is true for Roman civilization too, the Romans always retained a strong identification with the small-time family farmers who were their ancestors.

Suggested Reading

Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*.

Flower, *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Republic*.

Questions to Consider

- ✦ What do you think the story of Lucretia tells us about the role and status of women in Roman society, and would you tell this story to your own daughters as a tale of an inspirational woman?
- ✦ The Romans liked to think of themselves as a nation of simple farmers. In what ways would having a nation made up of such farmers be advantageous and/or disadvantageous to a civilization?



THE CONSTITUTION OF THE ROMAN REPUBLIC

LECTURE 5

Throughout history, the political structure and institutions of the Roman Republic have had many admirers. The historian Polybius, for example, credited the constitution of the republic as the explanation for Rome's strength and astonishing military success. This lecture examines the institutions of the Roman Republic to discover what was so original and distinctive about them.

CITIZENSHIP

- ◆ One of the most important distinctions in Roman society was that between citizens and noncitizens. The number of citizens was always a small minority of the total populace. Even later, at the height of the Roman Empire, at a time when there were perhaps 50 million people living within the empire, it is estimated that there were only about 6 million citizens.
- ◆ The requirements for full citizenship were that you had to be a free adult male. Thus, by definition, women, children, and slaves were excluded from being full citizens. In addition, you had to have passed the census, which identified your age, geographical origin, family, wealth, and moral virtue.
- ◆ For hundreds of years, the Romans were reluctant to extend citizenship even to the thoroughly Romanized inhabitants of Italy, until forced to do so by the Social War in the late republic. Once Rome acquired overseas provinces, it still remained reluctant to grant citizenship to provincials on a large scale.
- ◆ The visible symbol of citizenship was the toga, a garment derived from the Etruscans. Roman citizens wore plain white togas. By law, only citizens were allowed to wear them.



- ◆ During the early and middle Republic, the two main duties of a citizen were to fight in the army and to cast one's vote in elections. Being a citizen gave you protection and—in theory at least—equal treatment under the law.
- ◆ In social terms, Roman citizens were formally divided into two groups, the patricians and the plebeians. This distinction went back to the earliest days of Rome, when society was dominated by a small number of wealthy, landowning families who collectively became known as the patricians—literally, “the fathers.”
- ◆ This dominance became institutionalized through laws stating that only patricians were eligible to hold high political office, and that patricians could only marry members of other patrician families. The sole way to possess patrician status was to be a member of one of this small set of families.
- ◆ All nonpatricians—the vast majority of the citizen body—were labeled plebeians. These distinctions resulted in considerable social unrest, culminating in a struggle known as the Conflict of the Orders, which lasted from the beginning of the 6th century B.C. until 287 B.C.
- ◆ As a result of these struggles, the privileges of patricians were steadily eroded and eventually eliminated, although being a member of a patrician family continued to convey a certain status throughout Roman history. From 445 B.C. on, patricians and plebeians were allowed to legally intermarry.
- ◆ Another way in which Roman citizens were divided up was by wealth. Every so often, the state appointed a special magistrate called a censor to review the wealth and moral worthiness of all citizens. If your total wealth was more than 400,000 sesterces, you were granted equestrian status.
- ◆ Equites wore special gold rings and had togas with a narrow purple stripe, so that anyone encountering them in the street would instantly know their status. Many equestrians seem to have operated successful commercial enterprises. In the empire, a number of important government posts were allotted to equestrians.

GOVERNMENT

- ◆ The core of the Roman government centered around a series of magistracies, or offices. All of these magistracies shared a number of characteristics: officeholders obtained their positions by election; officeholders served one-year terms; officeholders had to meet minimum age requirements for each office; and each office was collegial, meaning that more than one person held the same title at the same time.
- ◆ The lowest magistracy was the quaestorship. Under the fully developed system, quaestors were supposed to be 30 years old and were in charge of various financial affairs. Originally there were only two quaestors elected each year; over time, however, there was need for more and more officials, and the number grew to 20. Different quaestors had varying specific duties, with some, for example, in charge of monitoring taxation, others overseeing financial matters in a province, and others controlling government finances.
- ◆ The next magistracy was the aedileship. Aediles had to be 36 years old, and four were elected each year. The aediles were responsible for a variety of urban affairs, including the maintenance and repair of urban infrastructure, monitoring markets to insure fair trade and enforce uniform standards of weights and measures, and staging public festivals.
- ◆ Above the aediles were the praetors, who had to be 39 years old. As with the quaestors, the number of praetors gradually increased over time, from one to as many as eight. Praetors mainly served judicial functions, overseeing law courts and the running of the judiciary system.
- ◆ The most prestigious post of all was the consulship. Consuls had to be 42 years old, and only two were elected each year. They acted as the chief executives of the state, and, at least during most of the republic, served as the generals of Rome's armies.
- ◆ Finally, there was the Roman Senate. The word "senate" is derived from the Latin *senex*, meaning "an old man," and during the monarchy, the Senate seems to have been just that: an advisory council to the kings

composed of elderly aristocrats. In the republic, the Senate became one of the most powerful elements of the government. Senators wore togas with a thick purple stripe, proclaiming their special status.

- ◆ The membership of the Senate varied, probably between 300 and 500 individuals, and the only way you could join it was to have held one of the major magistracies in the Roman government. Thus, it was a body entirely composed of former magistrates. Membership was for life; even if you never held another office, you would remain a member of the Senate until death.
- ◆ The formal legislative powers of the Senate were somewhat limited. Its main function was advisory. The Senate would meet, debate, and then issue a decree of the Senate—a *senatus consultum*—which gave its advice on a certain matter. However, because it consisted of Rome's social, political, and financial elite, its advice on matters both domestic and foreign was taken seriously, and almost everything it recommended came to pass. Over time, it also acquired a number of formal powers, especially in regard to foreign affairs.



- ◆ The ambition of all Roman patricians was to move up the ladder of offices, which was known as the *cursus honorum*, or the “course of honor.” The perfect career for a politician was to be elected to each of the offices at the minimum age; but you were constantly competing, not only with all your peers of the same age, but with everyone from earlier years who had not been one of the fortunate few to win election at the minimum age.
- ◆ There was one other important elected office that was not considered part of the traditional *cursus honorum* and that did not earn you membership in the Senate. This was the office of tribune of the plebs, whose primary duty was to protect and look out for the rights and interests of plebeians. This office was added as a result of rising tensions between patrician and plebeian which may have culminated in a sort of mass walkout strike by the plebeians.
- ◆ The number of tribunes varied over time. Like other magistrates, they gained office by election and served one-year terms. To safeguard plebeian rights, they had a number of unusual powers. A tribune could directly propose legislation to the assemblies, and he himself enjoyed a special status of immunity intended to protect him.
- ◆ The tribunes’ most potent prerogative, however, was the tribunician veto. This gave them the right to declare laws invalid, to revoke actions of other officials, and to overturn legal decisions. This powerful privilege was rarely invoked, but was intended, by its very existence, to curb the worst excesses of patrician power.

PATRONAGE

- ◆ One final significant component of Roman social structure was not delineated by a formal or legal set of rules, yet it played an important part in daily life. This was the patronage system, which developed as a way to link together Romans of varying status.

- ◆ In many respects, the structure of Roman society was designed to pit various groups against one another: patrician versus plebeian, free versus slave, citizen versus noncitizen. Such a society needed something to counteract these tensions, and for the Romans, it was the patronage system.
- ◆ Powerful men would serve as patrons to a group of their social or economic inferiors, who were known as the man's clients. Patrons would offer financial or legal help and protection to their clients. For example, a client who was down on his luck might get a gift of cash or even food from his patron in order to provide for his family. A patron might help a client obtain a job, or might use his influence to get one of his clients out of a legal scrape.
- ◆ Of course, patrons were not just doing this out of the goodness of their hearts. Whereas clients tended to get material aid from patrons, in return, the clients would perform actions that enhanced the prestige or reputation of their patrons. For example, clients would be expected to support their patron with their votes during an election.

Suggested Reading

Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship*.

Taylor, *Roman Voting Assemblies*.

Wallace-Hadrill, *Patronage in Ancient Society*.

Questions to Consider

- ✦ To what degree does the constitution of the Roman Republic deserve to be considered democratic?
- ✦ What strengths and weaknesses do you see in the structures and institutions of the Roman Republic?



THE UNIFICATION OF THE ITALIAN PENINSULA

LECTURE 6

Rome's conquest of the Italian Peninsula was neither rapid nor inevitable; it was a long, gradual process lasting from the foundation of the republic around 500 B.C. down until roughly 250 B.C. Rome's military successes during this period are attributable more to dogged persistence than to any significant technological or tactical superiority.

ETRURIA AND THE LATIN LEAGUE

- ◆ The story of Rome's expansion into Italy predictably begins with their closest neighbors—the Etruscans and the Latin tribes of central Italy. Etruscan power was incrementally fading away, and Rome was able to encroach into their territory of Etruria, capturing such Etruscan strongholds as Veii and Tarquinia.
- ◆ The struggle against Veii was especially prolonged, but significant, because Veii was located close to Rome in the same part of the Tiber River basin, and subjugating it removed one of Rome's main rivals in central Italy. Rome fought at least three distinct wars against Veii, which included a number of defeats for Rome.
- ◆ The process of subduing all of the Etruscan cities was a prolonged one, with the last holdouts not submitting to Rome until well into the 3rd century B.C. In taking over Etruria from the Etruscans, much arable land was confiscated and redistributed to colonists from Rome.
- ◆ Rome's immediate neighbors in central Italy were the cities of what is now known as the Latin League. In 499 B.C., Rome won a victory against the league. Shortly thereafter, the two sides signed a treaty in which they were on roughly equal footing, with each agreeing to come to the aid of the other if attacked. While the language of the treaty was technically defensive, in practice, Rome and the Latins would cooperate on numerous battlefields for over a century.

- ◆ In concert with the Latin League, Rome fought many battles against mountain tribes such as the Aequi, the Volsci, and the Hernici, and gradually defeated them. In this process, Rome cleverly used a divide-and-conquer strategy, making temporary alliances with one tribe while focusing their attention on another. Once that enemy had been defeated, Rome would break their alliance and attack their former ally.
- ◆ After defeating the various mountain tribes, Rome promptly turned against its former partners, the Latin League. By 338 B.C., Rome had defeated all of the Latin cities and officially dissolved the league. These Latin cities were very similar in culture and language to the Romans, and thus were easy to assimilate.

THE GAULS AND THE SAMNITES

- ◆ Rome's expansion into northern Italy soon brought them into contact with the Gauls, a Celtic culture based in what is now modern France. While the Romans were encroaching on the old Etruscan territory from the south, the Gauls had begun to do the same from the north, crossing the Alps and occupying much of the fertile Po River valley.
- ◆ When the Romans and Gauls inevitably came into conflict, the immediate outcome proved to be one of the worst disasters in Roman history. At the Battle of the River Allia in 390 B.C., the Gauls inflicted a crushing defeat on the Romans. The Gauls then exploited their victory by sweeping down into central Italy and actually sacking the city of Rome.
- ◆ Fortunately for the Romans, the Gauls were more interested in plunder than in territory. In exchange for a bribe of 1,000 pounds of gold, they were ultimately persuaded to depart. The sack of Rome by the Gauls effectively halted Roman expansion to the north, and for the next several centuries, the Romans mostly left the Gauls alone.



- ◆ To the south of Rome, there was a powerful federation of cities collectively known as the Samnites. The Samnites were perhaps the most serious foe that Rome faced in central Italy. They were a warlike and aggressive people, and between 343 B.C. and 290 B.C., the Romans fought three major wars against them.
- ◆ The Second Samnite War ended with an embarrassing defeat for the Romans when, at the Battle of the Caudine Forks in 321 B.C., the Samnites ambushed a Roman army in the mountains and compelled large numbers of Roman soldiers to surrender. The Roman captives were then subjected to a ritual humiliation in which they had to walk like beasts of burden beneath a yoke.

- ◆ Just a few years later in 298 B.C., the Third Samnite War erupted. Remnants of the Etruscans, Umbrians, and even some Gauls joined in against the expanding threat of Rome. How serious a rival the Samnites still were, however, is suggested by the fact that, even at this point, the Samnites likely had a larger population and controlled more territory than Rome.



- ◆ This Third Samnite War lasted until 290 B.C. The key moment was the Battle of Sentinum in 295 B.C. The Romans faced a massive host of Samnites, Gauls, and Etruscans, but cleverly split up this formidable coalition by sending a diversionary force to raid Etruscan territory, causing the Etruscan contingent to depart in order to defend their homes. The Romans then attacked the still sizable Samnite-Gallic army.
- ◆ Sentinum can be considered one of the truly pivotal battles in all of Roman history because it effectively established the Romans as the most powerful force on the Italian Peninsula. In the aftermath of this battle, the Samnites were abandoned by their allies, and Rome was able to concentrate its power against them. After several more battles, the Romans at long last succeeded in subduing the belligerent Samnites.
- ◆ One lasting effect of the Samnite campaigns was that, during the fighting, to facilitate the rapid movement of troops, the consuls began construction of the great Roman road system that would eventually link Rome with the rest of its empire. Roman roads were marvels of engineering, and many are still in use today.

CONQUERED PEOPLES

- ◆ Throughout the process of unifying the Italian Peninsula under its control, Rome adopted an unusual way of treating the people they defeated. Normally in the ancient world if you conquered a place, you enslaved the inhabitants and imposed taxes on them. For the Romans, however, it was more common to pursue a strategy of integration. This took the form of extending varying degrees of Roman citizenship to the defeated Italians.
- ◆ Often, local aristocratic families were granted full Roman citizenship. On rare occasions, entire cities were awarded this status. Some cities were given half-citizenship, which meant that they had most of the private rights of citizens, such as legal protections, but not the public rights, such as the right to vote. Finally, many cities were given the status of *socii*, or allies, of Rome.

- ◆ Implicit in this system was the idea that the conquered peoples might one day move up to the next higher status; thus, allies could aspire to eventually gain the rights and privileges of half-citizens, and half-citizens might ultimately graduate to full citizenship.
- ◆ Conquered areas were sometimes required to pay tribute to Rome, and sometimes they were not. The one universal obligation imposed on the vanquished, whether full citizen, half-citizen, or ally, was to provide troops for the Roman army. All subjugated Italian cities had to put their armed forces under the command of the Romans and send their men to serve in the Roman military. They also had to yield full control of their foreign-policy decisions to the Romans.
- ◆ This strategy of sharing some form of citizenship was an unusual one in the ancient world. On the surface, it might appear that the Romans were being generous; however, the practical effect of making the primary obligation of the conquered to supply men for the army rather than paying money was that it gave Rome nearly unlimited manpower to draw upon. Given the policy of near-constant warfare that Rome pursued, having access to enormous manpower reserves was an obvious military advantage. Furthermore, troops who served with the Roman army also tended to become Romanized, picking up the Latin language and Roman customs if they did not share them already. Latin soon became the dominant common language of the entire Italian Peninsula.
- ◆ While the Romans could be generous conquerors, they could also be brutal, and on occasion they were, particularly if a city that had been granted privileges chose to revolt against them. Then they might well raze the city to the ground, enslave the populace, or slaughter them entirely—sometimes deliberately mutilating bodies, lopping off limbs, and chopping pets in two.

- ◆ Rome was fond of establishing colonies as another way to control conquered territory. An estimated 30,000 full Roman citizens were gifted land and settled in such colonies all over Italy, and they were joined by a similar number of chosen allies. Thus, the people of Italy were bound to Rome through a mixture of threats, rewards, and laws.
- ◆ In Rome, the population of the city itself soon swelled to approximately 150,000 inhabitants, necessitating continual rounds of infrastructure expansion. With the Italian Peninsula firmly under their control, the Romans were now in a position to begin thinking about crossing the seas and, for the first time, expanding outside of Italy.

Suggested Reading

Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*.

Walbank et al., *The Cambridge Ancient History*.

Questions to Consider

- † When considering the conquest of Italy, do you think the Romans appear to be an unusually warlike civilization?
- † How do you assess the wisdom of the Romans' policy of sharing some degree of citizenship with the conquered Italians?



ROMAN RELIGION: SACRIFICE, AUGURY, AND MAGIC

LECTURE 7

The Romans viewed themselves as both a religious people and one that was favored by the gods, and they would have pointed to divine providence as one of the explanations for their rise and success. As Rome began to expand and conquer other peoples, the conquered peoples' beliefs and gods often incorporated into Roman religion.

GODS AND GODDESSES

- ◆ Roman paganism was a polytheistic religion. For the Romans, the world was a place inhabited by an infinite number of gods. When the Romans encountered other religions, they were very open about adding these new gods to the list of those they already worshipped. Thus the Roman pantheon was constantly expanding.
- ◆ Each individual would pick one or more gods to worship as his or her particular guardians. Because certain gods were associated with specific cities and professions, these gods would probably have received particular attention from people of that profession or who lived in that city.
- ◆ Roman religion did not possess a standardized sacred text. While there were certain rituals, such as sacrifice, that were commonly prescribed for the worship of the gods, there was no central and all-encompassing theology. Roman religion was a loose collection of diverse gods and practices allowing a great deal of variety and personal choice.
- ◆ Roman religion featured different types of gods whose powers, inclinations, and areas of influence varied greatly. The state religion was based on the worship of a subset of all these gods who were thought to be particularly concerned with the success and preservation of the Roman state, but individuals could choose any combination of gods to pay homage to.
- ◆ The most prominent Roman gods were what might be termed the Olympian gods. This set of deities, derived from the Greek gods said to live on Mount Olympus, included Jupiter, Juno, Mars, Venus, Neptune,

Apollo, Diana, Ceres, Bacchus, Mercury, Minerva, Vesta, and Vulcan. Among the most important of these for the Romans were Jupiter, the king of the gods, and Mars, the god of war.

- ◆ In addition to these gods, there were what might be called demigods—men who had attained divine status, such as the Greek hero Hercules. There were many entities which might be called gods as well, such as spirits of streams, rivers, and trees. Such a god was a *genius loci*, literally “the spirit of the place.” Some gods were personifications of abstract qualities. The most important of these to the Romans were Fortuna, or luck, and Victoria, victory.
- ◆ Finally, there were all the gods borrowed from other cultures, including Egyptian, Etruscan, and Germanic ones. Further complicating Roman religion was the fact that when encountering new foreign gods, the Romans sometimes decided that these gods were simply local variants of gods they already knew.

RELIGIOUS ORDERS

- ◆ In ancient Rome, there were very few professional priests. There was a great variety of types of priests; with a few exceptions, however, priesthood was not a full-time occupation, nor did most priests receive any specialized training. Priests mainly performed certain public rituals and sacrifices.
- ◆ The most prominent priests, who were almost exclusively male, were members of several important priesthoods called colleges. Each college had a fixed number of positions. When one member died, a new one was selected to take his place. Once elected to a priesthood, one held the office until death.
- ◆ The most important of these colleges was the Pontifical College. It contained 16 men called pontifices and 15 called flamens. The leader of this college was known as the *pontifex maximus* (“great priest”), and was considered the overall head of religious affairs.

- ◆ Each of the flamens was associated with one particular god. Of these, 12 were known as minor flamens. The remaining three, the major flamens, were associated with three gods who were thought to have special links to the Roman people: Jupiter the king of the gods; Mars the god of war; and Quirinus, a deity associated with the Roman state and citizenship.
- ◆ Attached to the college of the pontiffs was a group of six women known as the Vestal Virgins. These were women who served Vesta, the goddess of the hearth. The most important duty of the Vestal Virgins was to tend the sacred fire. If this fire was allowed to go out, it was considered an omen foretelling the destruction of the city.
- ◆ To be a Vestal Virgin, a woman had to be a virgin, and had to remain a virgin the entire time she served the goddess. If a Vestal Virgin lost her virginity and was discovered, she was dressed in funeral clothes, carried in a funeral procession, and then buried alive in an underground room.



- ◆ Vestal Virgins had to serve for 30 years. In the first decade of their service, they learned their duties; in the second, they performed them; and in the third, they taught others. After 30 years, they had the option of resigning from the priesthood and getting married, but few did this.
- ◆ The next most important college was the college of augurs, who were 16 in number. These priests had a specialized job; they had to discern the will of the gods through the interpretation of various signs. Much of Roman religious ritual practice, including augury, may have been derived from or at least influenced by the Etruscans.
- ◆ The three main categories of augury were the observation of the flight and feeding habits of birds, the inspection of the internal organs of sacrificed animals, and the interpretation of portents, such as lightning, natural disasters, and bizarre occurrences. By law, all important public acts or events had to be preceded by some form of augury; if the omens were unfavorable, the event had to be cancelled.
- ◆ In times of great disaster, when the state itself seemed threatened, another college, the decemviri, was called upon. The decemviri were the custodians of a group of ancient scrolls called the Sibylline Books, supposedly given to the Romans in the earliest days of their history by a prophetess known as the Sibyl. The priests would randomly pluck a page from these books and read it; whatever it instructed, they would do. Usually this involved the introduction of a new god or ceremony.
- ◆ Another important priestly college was the fetials. This priesthood, with 20 members, performed religious rites involving international relations, including declarations of war and the signing of treaties.

RELIGIOUS RITUALS

- ◆ Sacrifice was a major part of religious worship. The Romans sacrificed many different animals to their various gods, including goats, cows, bulls, sheep, pigs, birds, dogs, and horses. Male animals were sacrificed to male gods, and female animals to goddesses. White animals were sacrificed to gods of the sky, and black animals to gods of the underworld.

- ◆ A sacrificial animal had to be perfect. Any deformities or unusual coloration or characteristics rendered an animal unsuitable for sacrifice. If the animal had horns, ribbons were tied around them. If the sponsor of the sacrifice was rich, he or she would have the horns gilded with gold.



- ◆ Located outside of temples were altars, which was where the sacrifices actually occurred. When the animal was led to the altar, it was a good sign if it went willingly. If it struggled a lot, the officiant was supposed to get another animal and start over.
- ◆ Before the sacrifice, the worshipper would go inside the temple and, if making a vow, would write it on wax tablets and attach these to the cult statue. At the sacrifice, everyone involved had to be sure they had washed their hands, and the priests had to cover their heads. Except for the prayers, everyone was expected to remain silent. But throughout the course of the sacrifice, one person played a flute.
- ◆ Once the animal had been led to the altar, the prayer was recited, following the usual prayer formula of invocation of the deity's name, the geographic locations associated with the deity, and the actual request being made. If it was a large animal, one of the priest's attendants struck it on the head or neck with a hammer or axe, and then another cut its throat. They cut upward if it was for a god of the skies, downward if it was for a god of the underworld.
- ◆ The kill needed to be done cleanly and efficiently. If it was performed sloppily, this was a bad omen. The worst thing of all that could happen would be if the wounded animal broke free and ran off. This once occurred at a sacrifice over which Julius Caesar was presiding, and because he ignored it, he received much criticism.
- ◆ The internal organs were then removed, in particular the heart, liver, and intestines. These organs were cut up and burned in a fire on the altar. This comprised the actual offering to the gods and, as they were burned, the priest directed the following phrase to the god being honored: "Be you increased by this offering."
- ◆ If an error was made at any stage of this process, the whole thing had to be repeated, along with an extra prayer and sacrifice to make up for the error. Sometimes the priest would make a preliminary preemptive sacrifice in order to atone ahead of time for any error he might make.

- ◆ Some aspects of the Romans' religion we might consider more as superstitions than formal religious beliefs. Superstitions were widespread in the Roman world and were not limited to uneducated or unsophisticated Romans. One Roman general always carried around a little statue of the god Apollo; whenever he got in trouble, he would kiss it and pray to it.
- ◆ The Romans often tried to place curses on their enemies to bring them bad luck. Individuals would invoke magical powers to curse their enemies and cause them misfortune. Oddly enough, the exact details of many of these curses are known to us today because of the way in which they were created: The text of the curse was written on a tablet, often by a professional sorcerer, and then sent to the gods of the underworld by being dropped down a well, thrown in a cave, or buried.

Suggested Reading

Rüpke, *A Companion to Roman Religion*.
Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*.

Questions to Consider

- † What are the most significant ways in which Roman notions of the role and purpose of religion differ from those of modern monotheistic religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam?
- † What social and psychological purposes are served by the rituals and superstitions described in this lecture?



THE FIRST PUNIC WAR: A WAR AT SEA

LECTURE 8

The Punic Wars were a true turning point in Roman history. They were both the closest that Rome came to total defeat and the stepping stone to its ultimate success. Before the wars, Rome was an up-and-coming but still relatively minor power. After the wars, they were the most powerful state in the western Mediterranean.

THE RISE OF CARTHAGE

- ◆ The year 264 B.C. was a fateful one for Rome. In that year, Rome captured the last remaining Italian city, and got enmeshed in its first overseas war. This was the First Punic War, which was fought against the city of Carthage. Rome and Carthage would eventually fight a series of three wars, which the Romans would call the Punic Wars.
- ◆ Like Rome, Carthage was in charge of a rapidly expanding empire. By the mid-3rd century B.C., it was Rome's main rival in the western Mediterranean. Also like Rome, Carthage was located in an important strategic position. Located on the coast of North Africa, with a good harbor at the bottleneck where the Mediterranean was narrowest, Carthage could command all sea travel going from east to west.
- ◆ According to legend, Carthage had been founded around 750 B.C. as a trading outpost of the Phoenician city of Tyre, but had eventually broken away and set up its own empire, bringing most of the local North African tribes under its command. Unlike Rome, Carthage did not incorporate its conquered territories or share any degree of citizenship with their inhabitants. Instead, Carthage forced defeated states to pay tribute to them.
- ◆ By the time of the outbreak of the First Punic War, Carthage held the coastline of North Africa from modern Libya to Morocco. A scattering of Carthaginian outposts stretched southward along the Atlantic coast of Africa, and Carthaginian settlements were also founded in Spain, Sardinia, Corsica, and the Balearic Islands.

- ◆ While the early Romans were primarily farmers, the Carthaginians were merchants. Especially lucrative was Carthage's control over regions with rich mineral resources. Mines in Spain and Sardinia yielded valuable metals, including silver, copper, and iron. Carthaginian merchants established trade networks with Britain that gave them access to tin, a rare but highly valued resource in the Mediterranean.
- ◆ From naval voyages to the west coast of Africa, as well as land trade routes deeper into the continent, Carthage obtained gold, ivory, and even elephants, which were trained and incorporated into the Carthaginian army. The city maintained a large merchant fleet, and carried out an active trade in both staples and luxury items all over the Mediterranean.
- ◆ Compared to Rome, the number of Carthaginian citizens was small. When they needed an army, the Carthaginians would use their wealth to hire mercenaries, and would recruit soldiers from the indigenous tribes in the territories that they controlled. To protect their merchant ships, the Carthaginians maintained one of the largest and most powerful fleets of warships in the Mediterranean.
- ◆ While the political system of Carthage was technically a mixture of oligarchy and democracy, true power resided in the hands of a small group of wealthy merchant families. The Carthaginians maintained the religious practices of their Phoenician ancestors, and there was a close association between the city's political and religious affairs.

THE SEEDS OF WAR

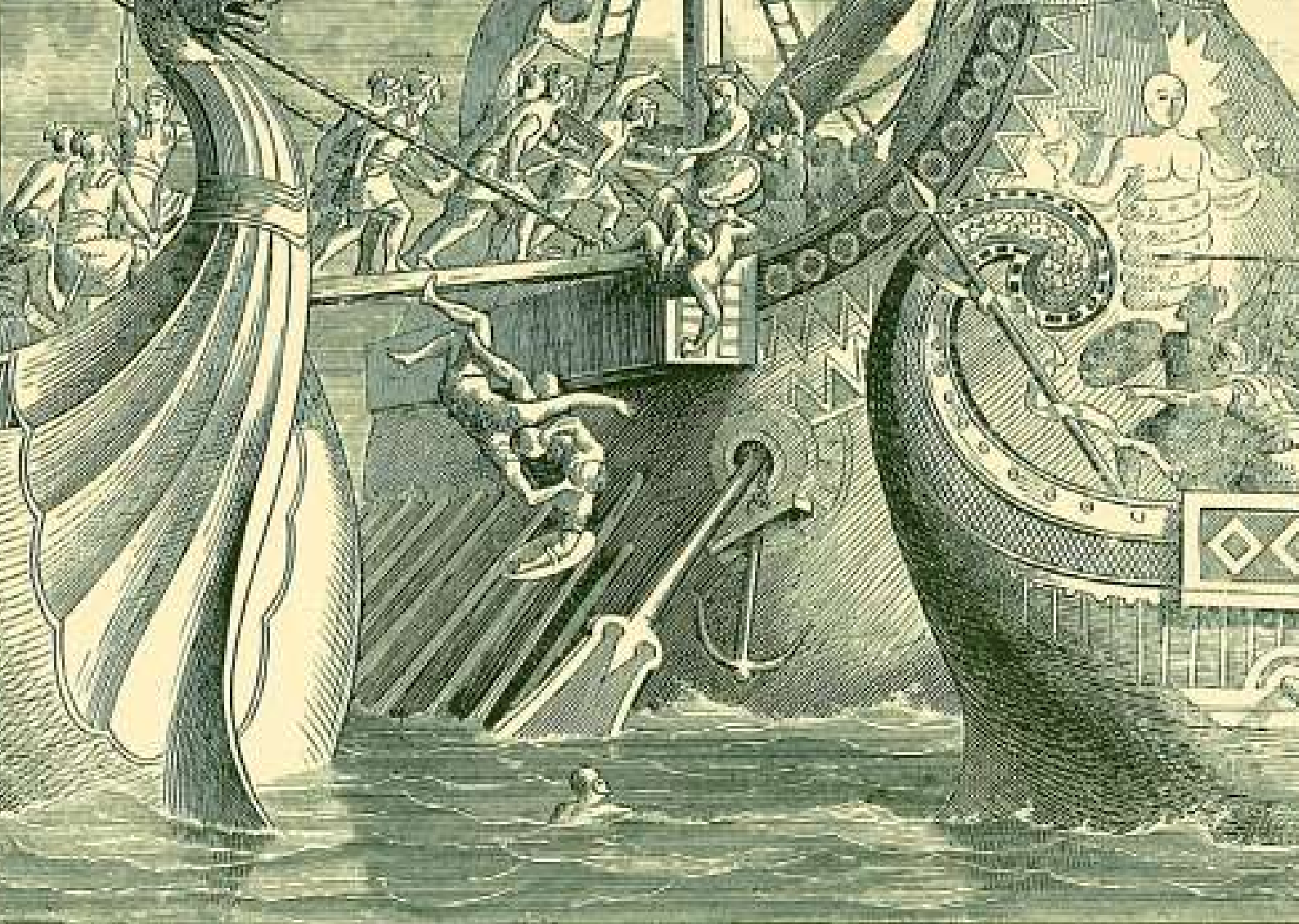
- ◆ Prior to the First Punic War, Rome and Carthage had a long history of relatively amicable diplomatic relations. Over the previous 250 years, they had signed a sequence of three treaties with one another, acknowledging each other's respective zones of influence and pledging noninterference within those. By 264 B.C., however, each side had expanded to the point where direct conflicts of interest between them became unavoidable.

- ◆ Both Rome and Carthage naturally wished to possess the vital sea straits that passed to the north and south of the island of Sicily. Whoever controlled these waterways would have a stranglehold on east-west trade in the Mediterranean.
- ◆ Sicily was home to a number of particularly wealthy cities; whoever could bring these cities under their control stood to reap substantial economic benefits. The Romans may also have felt an obligation to protect the trading interests of former Greek cities in southern Italy, which were now their allies and were losing out to Carthaginian merchants.
- ◆ Also factoring into the underlying causes of the First Punic War was the long series of conflicts that Rome had recently fought against its fellow Italians. These conflicts had left the Romans with an almost paranoid fear of powerful neighbors. In addition, many ambitious aristocrats would favor almost any war, which they viewed as a chance to gain military glory.
- ◆ Rome and Carthage were founded at roughly the same time, and they were both young, vigorous, growing expansionist empires. Despite these similarities, their differences were even more pronounced. Rome's military strength was its army composed of citizen/soldier/farmers; Carthage's was its navy, while its army was heavily dependent on mercenaries and conscripted foreign tribes.
- ◆ While the true underlying causes of the Punic Wars lay in the fundamentally geography-based rivalry between Rome and Carthage, the more immediate cause had to do with the actions of a band of mercenaries known as the Mamertines. Originally from the region of Campania in Italy, they took their name from the Italic god Mamers, a version of the Roman god of war, Mars.
- ◆ The Mamertines had been hired as mercenaries by the ruler of Syracuse, the wealthiest and most powerful city in Sicily, to help capture another Sicilian city, Messana. During a period of political instability in Syracuse, the Mamertines abandoned their employer and opportunistically seized control of Messana, murdering many of the Messanians in the process, then launching raids into Syracusan territory.

- ◆ Once a new, dynamic Syracusan leader arose, the Mamertines feared retribution for their earlier actions. Accordingly, they sought a powerful patron outside of Sicily who might offer them protection from Syracuse. In 265 B.C., with a Syracusan army threatening Messina, the Mamertines invited Carthage to send military forces to their assistance. Eager to expand their influence in Sicily, the Carthaginians quickly accepted, occupying a fortress at Messina with a token force.
- ◆ The Mamertines became worried that the Carthaginians would not leave once the crisis was over, so they sent a message to Rome asking the Romans to send a military force as well. The Mamertines may, in fact, have sent invitations to both groups simultaneously, but the Romans were slower to respond. In 264 B.C., the Roman consuls successfully persuaded the Roman people to vote for an expedition.
- ◆ The arrival of the Romans caused the Carthaginians to ally themselves with Syracuse against Messina and their new Roman friends. Open warfare soon broke out. The First Punic War had begun. It would prove to be the longest continuous war of the ancient Mediterranean world, lasting for more than 20 years.

EMPIRE AGAINST EMPIRE

- ◆ Foremost among the difficulties facing Rome in the First Punic War was that the Romans had committed themselves to a war over an island, against an opponent that possessed one of the largest and most powerful fleets of warships in the Mediterranean.
- ◆ The Romans lacked a sizable navy, had a farming culture's generally suspicious view of the sea, and, when they did venture out to sea, initially proved to be terrible sailors who repeatedly and fatally ignored threatening weather. Nonetheless, with typical Roman determination, they threw themselves into the war effort.



- ◆ Ancient warships were delicate and could not stay at sea for long. As a result, most of Carthage's fleet was in storage at the outbreak of war. Rome took advantage of this temporary lull in Carthaginian sea power to quickly transport both of its consuls and their armies to Sicily to begin an aggressive campaign.
- ◆ Confronted by the powerful Roman force, Syracuse switched sides, signing a treaty allying themselves with Rome against Carthage. The Romans then besieged and captured the Carthaginian stronghold of Agrigentum. Alarmed by these successes, the Carthaginians recalled their current commander in Sicily.
- ◆ Encouraged by these easy victories, the Romans began to think about seizing all of Sicily for themselves. They realized, however, that if they were to take and hold the island, they would need a navy. In 261 B.C., they began the construction of a full-size fleet to match Carthage's.

- ◆ The Romans could not match the experience and skill of the Carthaginian sailors when it came to the complex maneuvers that were typically used to win naval battles. Realizing this, the Romans adopted an innovative strategy of closing with the enemy ships and boarding them, effectively turning the sea battle into a land battle between soldiers—a type of warfare at which they excelled.
- ◆ In 260 B.C., the Roman and Carthaginian fleets met in battle. The overconfident Carthaginian ships plunged straight toward the Romans, whereupon the Roman ships surprised them, dropping gangplanks across to the Carthaginian ships and quickly capturing the leading squadron of 30 vessels. Using this technique, the Romans won several shocking victories, conquered most of Sicily, and even landed a force in Africa to threaten Carthage directly.
- ◆ The Romans had never really learned to be good sailors, however. In 255 B.C., Roman admirals ignored the signs of an approaching storm. When the storm was over, only 80 out of 250 Roman ships were left. As many as 100,000 Romans had been drowned in one afternoon. In 253 B.C., an even worse storm caught a newly built Roman fleet and sank it, drowning thousands more. In 249 B.C., another 93 out of 123 ships were lost by the Romans in a naval battle at Drepana.
- ◆ Meanwhile, Carthage had finally come up with an excellent general—a dynamic and skilled tactician named Hamilcar Barca, who reinvigorated the Carthaginian war effort in Sicily. Hamilcar swiftly attacked and recaptured most of the cities of Sicily. Everything was finally going Carthage's way.



TURNING THE TIDE

- ◆ Back in Carthage, a new political faction had taken control of the Carthaginian government. The city's leaders were heavily focused on issues on the mainland of Africa, and were not that interested in events in Sicily. They withdrew or dismantled most of the Carthaginian fleet, and failed to provide Hamilcar with necessary supplies or any reinforcements.
- ◆ The Romans once more had the upper hand in Sicily. Their armies pressed Hamilcar, retaking a number of cities. Hamilcar fought on cleverly, making the best of his resources, and the war dragged on. In 241 B.C., at the Battle of the Aegates Islands, a new Roman fleet decisively defeated a hastily assembled and probably undermanned Carthaginian one.
- ◆ With the last hope of support gone, the Carthaginian forces in Sicily were in an impossible position. In 241 B.C., Carthage and Rome signed a peace treaty, bringing the long war to an end. Carthage was allowed to recall Hamilcar and his remaining troops to Africa. In return, Carthage agreed pay a large cash indemnity to Rome, surrender all claims to Sicily, and acknowledge Roman dominion over the island.
- ◆ The First Punic War marks an important turning point in Roman history, not so much because it removed Carthage as a rival for dominance—it did not—but because it brought Rome its first major overseas territory. This acquisition created a bureaucratic dilemma regarding how to administer the newly gained territory.
- ◆ After a bit of experimentation, Rome decided that Sicily would become a Roman province under the direct control of a Roman governor. The main requirement imposed on the Sicilians would not be to supply troops to the Roman military, but to pay annual taxes. This solution, of turning territories into tax-paying provinces under the command of a Roman governor, would be applied to all future Roman conquests.

- ◆ Although Rome was clearly the winner of the First Punic War, Carthage was far from vanquished as a rival to Rome for domination of the western Mediterranean. Carthage still possessed its African territories, as well as its outposts in Spain and on other islands in the Mediterranean. The fates of both sides would be spectacularly determined in the Second Punic War, which would break out just two decades later.

Suggested Reading

Goldsworthy, *The Fall of Carthage*.

Lazenby, *The First Punic War*.

Questions to Consider

- ✦ Although they are very different societies, at the beginning of the First Punic War, Rome and Carthage seemed fairly evenly matched. What were the greatest strengths and weaknesses of each side, and which do you think were most important in the long run?
- ✦ Which side had the moral high ground in the First Punic War? To put it another way, who is most to blame for starting the war?



THE SECOND PUNIC WAR: ROME VERSUS HANNIBAL

LECTURE 9

The Second Punic War was the crucible in which the Roman Empire was forged. During the war, Rome suffered a staggering series of horrific defeats that brought it to the brink of collapse. In managing to survive, and then eventually to prevail, Rome emerged from the war indisputably the strongest power in the Mediterranean.

SETTING THE STAGE

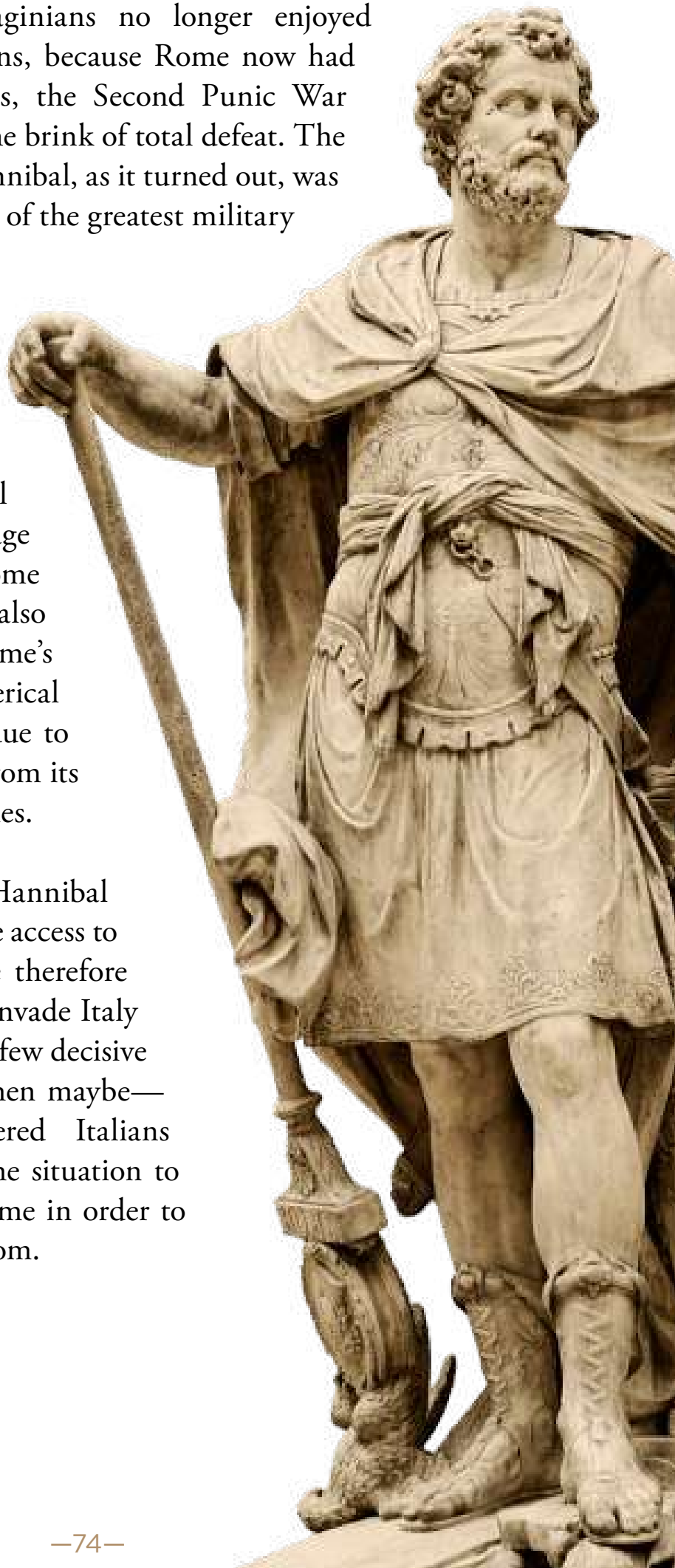
- ◆ Rome came away from the First Punic War in possession of Sicily, but Carthage, while bruised, was far from beaten. Carthage still held the coastline of North Africa from modern Libya to Morocco, and was desirous of enlarging its territory.
- ◆ The First Punic War had thwarted Carthaginian expansion northward among the islands of the Mediterranean. To the south, there were only the empty wastes of the Sahara. To the west was the Atlantic Ocean, and to the east was the powerful kingdom of Hellenistic Egypt.
- ◆ The one remaining option was to hop across the Strait of Gibraltar and move into Spain. The Carthaginians had long owned several outposts on the Mediterranean coast of Spain, and they now looked to expand from these footholds into the rest of the peninsula.
- ◆ The leader in this effort was Hamilcar Barca, who had so effectively led the Carthaginian armies in Sicily until betrayed by a lack of support from his own government. He now applied his considerable military skills to conquering the warlike Celtiberian tribes of Spain, and succeeded in bringing many of them under his control.
- ◆ Legend has it that when Hamilcar left for Spain, he asked his nine-year-old son, Hannibal, if the boy would like to accompany him. When young Hannibal enthusiastically replied yes, Hamilcar supposedly made the boy place his hand on a sacrifice and swear a solemn vow to always view Rome as an enemy. When he was 26 years old, Hannibal assumed command in Spain, and continued his father's work.


- ◆ With the Carthaginians moving northeast from Spain and the Romans advancing southwest from Northern Italy, a collision between the two states seemed inevitable. War appeared to be averted, however, when Rome and Carthage signed a treaty in which the Carthaginians promised not to advance north of the Ebro River, while presumably being granted a free hand to the south of it.
- ◆ South of the Ebro, one of the major cities not yet under the control of Carthage was the town of Saguntum. This city seems to have entered into some sort of agreement with Rome, although the exact nature of their relationship is unclear. Saguntum was plainly not directly under Rome's control, but was perhaps considered an ally of Rome.
- ◆ Saguntum raided nearby territories under the control of Hannibal and the Carthaginians. In revenge, Hannibal attacked Saguntum. Rome decided it had to come to the aid of its friend, and, with this incident as the instigating spark, the Second Punic War began in 219 B.C.
- ◆ The question of which side was the aggrieved party is debatable. Carthage no doubt viewed Rome as being in violation of its treaty obligations, while Rome would have seen itself as simply helping an ally. A good measure of blame could be placed on Saguntum for entering into what was obviously a provocative relationship with Rome, and for foolishly raiding Carthaginian territory.

HANNIBAL WREAKS HAVOC

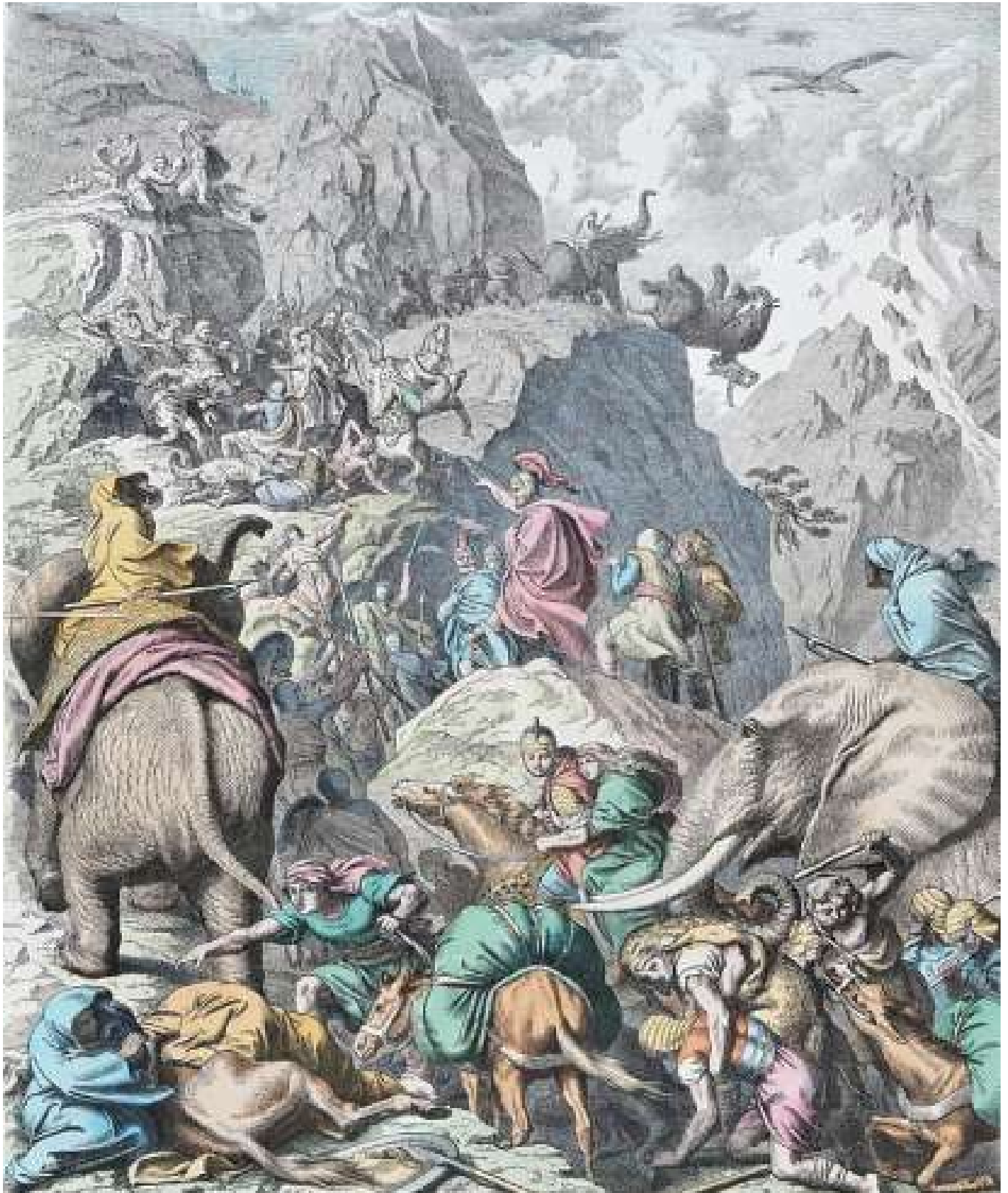
- ◆ At the beginning of the First Punic War, Carthage had seemed to have a slight edge over Rome. At the beginning of the Second Punic War, Rome was clearly far more powerful. They could call on the vast manpower reserves of all of Italy to field an army that was many times larger than anything Carthage could hope to assemble.

- ◆ Even at sea, the Carthaginians no longer enjoyed superiority over the Romans, because Rome now had a larger fleet. Nevertheless, the Second Punic War would see Rome come to the brink of total defeat. The reason for this was that Hannibal, as it turned out, was something exceptional: one of the greatest military geniuses of all time.
- ◆ Hannibal astutely realized that Carthage stood almost no chance against the might of Rome in a traditional conflict, and that Carthage could not wait and let Rome take the initiative. He also realized that one of Rome's greatest assets was the numerical advantage Rome enjoyed due to being able to raise troops from its Italian half-citizens and allies.
- ◆ For Carthage to win, Hannibal somehow had to deny Rome access to its manpower reserves. He therefore decided on a bold plan to invade Italy itself. If he could just win a few decisive victories on Roman soil, then maybe—just maybe—the conquered Italians might take advantage of the situation to revolt and turn against Rome in order to regain their ancestral freedom.



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- ◆ Hannibal's first dilemma was the practical question of how to get his army to Italy. The only choice was to march his army from Spain across the Alps and down into Italy. The Alps, however, were tall, icy, prone to landslides, and infested by murderous hill people, and it was believed to be impossible to cross them with a large army.
 - ◆ In early May of 218 B.C., Hannibal set out with an army of 40,000 men and 37 elephants. Incredibly, he made it, although the ice, snow, landslides, and hill people took such a toll that when he finally arrived in northern Italy, he only had 26,000 men and one elephant left.
 - ◆ The Romans were shocked and alarmed to find an enemy in Italy itself, and they quickly dispatched an army of 40,000 men under the command of both consuls to wipe out Hannibal's smaller and travel-weakened army. At the Battle of the Trebia in 218 B.C., Hannibal's military genius enabled him to completely outwit the Roman commanders and lure them into a trap. The Romans were badly beaten and the majority of their army destroyed.
 - ◆ In usual fashion, the Romans drew on their manpower to raise another army, and sent it after Hannibal in 217 B.C. Hannibal again caught the Romans by surprise by marching his men southward into Etruria via an unexpected route that was thought to be impassable. He cut through the marshlands of the Arno River, a difficult feat, especially because the river was swollen by winter rains.
 - ◆ Having broken into the heartland of Italy, Hannibal raided towns and destroyed farms. Goaded into a carelessly hasty pursuit by these actions, the Roman army rushed after Hannibal. This enabled him to set an ambush for the Romans in northern Italy along the foggy shores of Lake Trasimene, where his army pounced on them as they were strung out in marching formation. The unprepared Romans were slaughtered.

- ◆ The Romans were beginning to become alarmed, and a steady old general named Fabius Maximus was appointed dictator. He advocated a cautious policy of avoiding open battle and waiting Hannibal out. For a brief time, the Romans followed this plan. They also took advantage of the lull to raise several more armies.



- ◆ Soon, however, more hot-headed politicians took over and decided to crush Hannibal once and for all. A colossal army of 80,000 men marched out, led by both Roman consuls. By now, Hannibal was in south-central Italy. The Roman force caught up with him on August 2, 216 B.C., near a small hilltop town called Cannae.
- ◆ The Battle of Cannae is the most impressive monument to Hannibal's genius, and is still studied today as an example of brilliant strategy. In a single afternoon, Hannibal's troops hacked to death the incredible total of 65,000 Romans. This ranks among the bloodiest days in military history.
- ◆ The Battle of Cannae was one of the darkest moments in Roman history, and it threw the Romans into a frenzy of panic and despair. In Hannibal, they had finally met an enemy who seemed able to defeat any number of men that the Romans threw at him. Hannibal marched to the gates of Rome itself, but the Romans barricaded themselves in and refused to surrender.
- ◆ In the aftermath of Cannae, some of the Italian cities revolted against Rome, as Hannibal had hoped they would, and came over to the Carthaginian side. The vast majority of Italian cities, however, remained faithful to Rome, and Hannibal was reduced to roaming up and down Italy, unconquered and undefeated, but frustrated, looking for someone to fight. This went on for the next 12 years.

CHANGING TACTICS

- ◆ The Romans may have been afraid to face Hannibal, but they were not afraid of the other Carthaginian commanders. Rome raised more armies, which it sent to Spain. After some initial missteps, the Roman command fell to a young man in his twenties named Publius Cornelius Scipio, who, as luck would have it, turned out to be something of a military genius himself. Scipio conquered the Carthaginian territories in Spain, even capturing the key coastal city of New Carthage.

- ◆ A key moment came when a large Carthaginian army under the command of Hannibal's brother, Hasdrubal, set off to reinforce him in Italy. If these reinforcements had reached Hannibal, they might have given him the strength to force a showdown with the Romans in Italy. But the Romans intercepted Hasdrubal's army and destroyed it. Hannibal learned of the disaster when the Romans threw the severed head of his brother over the walls of his camp.
- ◆ Scipio next took the campaign to North Africa, which he invaded in 204 B.C. In Africa, he managed to pick up yet more allies. Of these, the most significant was the powerful kingdom of Numidia, renowned for its excellent horsemen. With Numidian aid, Scipio then marched on Carthage itself.
- ◆ Alarmed by the threat of Scipio, the Carthaginian high command ordered Hannibal to leave Italy and return to North Africa to defend the city. Sadly, Hannibal had no choice but to embark his remaining grizzled veterans and leave Italy, having won every battle in spectacular fashion, but having failed to achieve the strategic victory that he needed.
- ◆ The two armies came together outside Carthage at the Battle of Zama in 202 B.C. What should have been an epic showdown between two of history's greatest generals turned out to be something of an anticlimax. By now, the Romans knew how to neutralize the Carthaginian war elephants, and Scipio's generalship proved to be a match for Hannibal's.
- ◆ In addition to being on equal strategic footing, Scipio's troops were simply better, more numerous, and more enthusiastic than Hannibal's discouraged, aged veterans. Thus, for the first time, Hannibal was defeated. Carthage surrendered in 201 B.C., bringing the Second Punic War to a close.

- ◆ This time, Rome was determined to so weaken Carthage that it would never again pose a threat. Carthage had to pay a crushing cash indemnity over a 50-year period, give up almost all its territory except for the city itself, and keep only a small army and a token fleet of no more than 10 ships. Scipio became known as Scipio Africanus.
- ◆ Numidia became a client kingdom of Rome. There was no formal agreement, but clearly the Romans considered Numidia to be in the subordinate position, with Rome as its patron. Parts of Spain and North Africa were organized as taxpaying Roman provinces, and were assigned Roman governors.

Suggested Reading

Daly, *Cannae*.

Goldsworthy, *The Fall of Carthage*.

Questions to Consider

- † Do you think it was possible for Hannibal to have won the Second Punic War? What should he have done differently?
- † What was the most important factor in Rome's success—the generalship of Scipio, their manpower reserves, their determination, the loyalty of the Italians, or something else?



ROME CONQUERS GREECE

LECTURE 10

Can you accidentally conquer the world? As unlikely as it sounds, this question is at the heart of a famous debate about the fundamental nature of Roman imperialism: whether Rome's conquest of the Mediterranean was deliberate or accidental, aggressive or reactive. This lecture invites you to consider these issues through the lens of the Roman conquest of Greece and its territories in the eastern Mediterranean.

EARLY ENTANGLEMENTS

- ◆ Rome only became directly involved in the Hellenistic world—by which we mean the eastern half of the Mediterranean—toward the end of the 3rd century B.C., at about the same time that it was locked in the titanic struggle of the Second Punic War against Carthage.
- ◆ At the time, the most powerful states in the Hellenistic world were three great monarchies that had been formed by the division of Alexander the Great's empire among his generals after his death in 323 B.C. These were the Antigonid Kingdom, based in Macedonia and at times including Greece and Anatolia; the Seleucid Kingdom, centered in Syria and sometimes extending into the Middle East and Mesopotamia; and the Ptolemaic Kingdom, which held Egypt and had ambitions to expand into Palestine and the islands of the Mediterranean.
- ◆ In addition to these major players, there were a number of smaller but still important political entities, such as the kingdom of Pergamum in Asia Minor, and two federations of Greek city-states: the Aetolian League, composed mainly of cities in central Greece, and the Achaean League made up of Greek cities of the Peloponnesus, the southern part of mainland Greece.
- ◆ There were also dozens of petty kingdoms and unaligned city-states scattered throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Since the death of Alexander the Great, all of these states had engaged in a bewildering and seemingly perpetual series of shifting alliances and wars with one another.

- ◆ When the Romans began to interact with the eastern Mediterranean, they were entering into a very different realm. The dominant culture and language of the Hellenistic world were Greek. Compared to the cities and cultures of the western Mediterranean, the east was richer, more urbanized, and more culturally sophisticated. It was also something of an unknown land to the comparatively provincial Romans.
- ◆ Rome's very first involvement in the east took the form of a series of relatively minor conflicts known as the Illyrian Wars. Illyria is the region just across the Adriatic Sea from the eastern coast of Italy, and encompasses the areas that today are the countries of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- ◆ The Illyrian shoreline is uneven and rocky, with innumerable small inlets and coves. This makes it perfect territory for pirates, who could dash out from hidden sites and pounce on merchant vessels plying their trade up and down the coastline. Several small states who were allies of Rome and lived along the Adriatic were the most direct victims of the pirates. They began to pester their Roman patrons to do something about this perennial problem.
- ◆ Finally, in 230 B.C., the Romans dispatched a pair of envoys to Queen Teuta, the ruler of Illyria, to complain about the situation and to demand that her subjects cease attacking Roman vessels. Teuta saw these demands as foreign interference in a traditional Illyrian lifestyle, and contemptuously dismissed the Roman ambassadors. As if this were not enough of an insult, one of the Romans was killed while returning to Italy.
- ◆ Rome promptly declared war, sent a huge force of 200 ships and 20,000 men, and seized control of Illyria. Rome did not annex Illyria, however. Instead, the Romans imposed a number of strict conditions on the chastened Teuta, left part of the area under control of a client king, and made other cities "friends" of Rome.
- ◆ Technically, all that Rome left behind from this first incursion into the east was its friendship. Soon after, the client king began encroaching on some of the other cities; he apparently did not understand the meaning

of Roman friendship. Rome promptly sent an army and, in 219 B.C., crushed the client king in what became known as the Second Illyrian War. Rome then withdrew all its troops, again leaving behind only their friendship.

EXPANSION AND CONQUEST

- ◆ A bit later, during the height of the Second Punic War, Rome got involved with a more serious eastern foe. While the Carthaginian general Hannibal was running amok in Italy, the king of one of the three main Hellenistic kingdoms saw an opportunity to expand his territory while Rome was preoccupied.
- ◆ This king was Philip V of Macedon, a youthful ruler with grandiose ambitions. Philip entered into an alliance with Hannibal, a move sure to incur the paranoid suspicions of Rome. Rome countered by allying itself with the kingdom of Pergamum and the Aetolian League of Greek cities.
- ◆ With Rome too distracted by Hannibal to put much effort into the conflict with Philip, the war ended inconclusively; but Rome was now deeply entangled in a web of relationships of varying formality with numerous eastern states, a situation that almost ensured that they would be drawn into further conflicts.
- ◆ Philip's ambitions were only temporarily curbed. In 202 B.C., he again attempted to expand by swallowing up some of the lesser Greek states. Among the allies of those attacked was the kingdom of Pergamum, which had long had friendly relations with Rome. Pergamum appealed to Rome for assistance, and the Romans felt obligated to respond. With Carthage by now decisively crushed, the Romans, after some initial dithering, answered the Greek appeal to their friendship with a substantial army.



- ◆ The outcome was determined in one afternoon in 197 B.C. at the Battle of Cynoscephalae. Beyond its political consequences, this battle was an important moment because it was the first major meeting between the new Roman war machine and the older, highly regarded military system developed by Alexander the Great, and used by all of his Hellenistic successors.
- ◆ On one side of the field, the Macedonian phalanx marched downhill and smashed into the Romans, pushing them backward. On the other, the Romans threatened to break the Macedonian phalanx. The crucial turning point in the battle came when an enterprising Roman junior officer saw a chance to sweep around one side of the Macedonian phalanx and assault it from the rear. Victory at Cynoscephalae went to the Romans.
- ◆ After soundly defeating Philip, the Romans turned around and reinstated him as the ruler of Macedon, with the status of a client king. Second, Philip had to withdraw his garrisons from occupied Greek cities, disband his fleet, and pay a sizable cash indemnity to Rome.
- ◆ The Illyrian War and the first two Macedonian wars raise interesting issues about Roman imperialism. On the one hand, you could interpret the Romans' repeated withdrawals from the region, even after winning decisive victories, as evidence that they were not seeking to extend their empire. Over and over again, they immediately removed their troops and made no attempt to seize any of the lands for themselves.
- ◆ On the other hand, you could argue that, by leaving behind a web of friendship ties, the Romans knew that sooner or later this would provide them with an excuse to come back and use military force, to fight more wars, and for individual politicians to gain glory.
- ◆ A generation later, Rome's old friend, Pergamum, sucked them into a conflict with the second of the great Hellenistic Kingdoms, the Seleucid Empire. The current Seleucid king, Antiochus III, was seeking to expand his territory, and began to encroach upon Pergamum and other cities. The king of Pergamum appealed to Rome for help, and in 196 B.C., the Romans sent Flamininus, the general who had defeated the Macedonians,

to meet with Antiochus. Flamininus demanded that Antiochus yield some of the cities he had recently taken and ordered him to stay away from the independent cities of Asia Minor.

- ◆ Somewhat reasonably, Antiochus replied that Flamininus had no right to place such restrictions upon him, and furthermore, that Flamininus was not the official spokesperson for all Greek cities. Meanwhile, the Aetolians, formerly allies of Rome, now joined up with Antiochus. To the Romans, this seemed like insolence from Antiochus and betrayal by the Aetolians. Rome swiftly dispatched an army and, in 191 B.C. at Thermopylae, the Romans easily thrashed the combined Seleucid-Aetolian army.



- ◆ Antiochus sued for peace, and offered all that the Romans had earlier demanded and more. Back at Rome, however, the younger brother of Scipio Africanus, Lucius Cornelius Scipio, was consul, and was intent on gaining fame to equal that of his illustrious brother. With Africanus accompanying him as advisor, he set off for the east at the head of an army. Antiochus had no choice but to attempt to fight. At the Battle of Magnesia in 190 B.C., the Roman military system once again proved superior to the Hellenistic one, and Antiochus was soundly beaten.
- ◆ Antiochus had to surrender all of his holdings in Asia Minor, and pay Rome a massive cash indemnity. Again, though, Rome did not depose Antiochus, nor did it take any land for itself, instead giving it to its eastern allies, especially Pergamum. Then Rome withdrew its soldiers, leaving only their friendship behind.
- ◆ Things seemed settled for a brief period until Philip, the Antigonid king, died, and his son, Perseus, ascended to the throne of Macedon. After having lost twice to Rome, Philip had followed a strategy of appeasement toward Rome, and accordingly had been left alone by them, but now Perseus reversed this policy. His desire to stir up trouble found fertile ground among some of the Greeks, who had descended into internecine squabbling. The ultimate result of all of this intriguing was the Third Macedonian War, which broke out in 171 B.C.



- ◆ Perhaps at last getting fed up with these recurrent Macedonian wars, the Romans deposed Perseus and abolished the Macedonian monarchy. They attempted to establish in its place four weak and separate republics, while at the same time coopting much of the wealth of Macedon, such as its rich mines.
- ◆ The Romans' arrangement for the partition of Macedon was not met with favor by the Macedonians. Twenty years later, in 149 B.C., they rebelled at the instigation of a rather interesting rabble-rousing figure who claimed to be a lost son of Perseus. The Fourth Macedonian War had begun. Once more, the legions marched east, and predictably, the rebels were thoroughly trounced. This time, at long last, the Romans chose not to withdraw their troops, but instead annexed Macedon and turned it into a Roman province under the control of a Roman governor.
- ◆ After a revolt in 146 B.C., the Romans stripped the Greek city-states of most of their remaining sovereignty. From this point on, they were effectively under the control of Rome, although it would be almost another century before they were formally organized as a Roman province.
- ◆ Of the three great Hellenistic kingdoms, Antigonid Macedon had now ceased to exist, while the twice-defeated Seleucid kingdom had dwindled to the point where it was no longer a significant force. The third kingdom, Ptolemaic Egypt, had wisely stayed out of the conflicts with Rome, and in the latter stages, had actively sought friendship with the Romans.

ANALYZING ROME'S INTENTIONS

- ◆ Polybius, the Greek historian who was a victim of Roman imperialism, wrote, "It was not by accident or without knowing what they were doing that the Romans boldly struck out for universal domination and rule—and accomplished their aim." It is easy to sympathize with Polybius, and indeed the argument that Rome's actions were intentional is supported by the most basic fact of all—that Rome had conquered and annexed most of the Hellenistic world by 133 B.C.

- ◆ Nevertheless, one could look at the course of Roman involvement and conclude that the Romans seemed to have little or no desire to become entangled in Hellenistic affairs or to expand eastward. Circumstances repeatedly forced them into a hegemonic role, but they always assumed this role reluctantly. They ignored provocations of the most blatant kind, and, when finally compelled to intervene with military force, they repeatedly withdrew their legions immediately and completely.
- ◆ The same historical evidence can be used to support both interpretations. From the very first conflict with Queen Teuta onward, one can view almost every one of these wars either as examples of the Romans intrusively meddling in affairs outside their domain, or as the Romans simply being good neighbors who were drawn into a war by their generosity in responding to calls for help from victimized people.

Suggested Reading

Gruen, *The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome*.
Harris, *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome*.

Questions to Consider

- ✦ Which of Rome's eastern wars do you think was the most important, and why?
- ✦ Which interpretation of Roman imperialism do you find more convincing—that it was accidental and passive, or that it was deliberate and aggressive? Explain your reasoning.



THE CONSEQUENCES OF ROMAN IMPERIALISM

LECTURE 11

When we think of imperialism, we tend to assume that the victorious state imposes its culture upon the vanquished one. While there is no doubt that Rome's military and political domination of Greece was ruthless and total, it was Greek culture that took on an important role at Rome. This lecture will investigate the influence of Greek culture on Rome, as well as other repercussions of Rome's conquests in the Mediterranean.

EAST AND WEST

- ◆ The course of Roman imperialism followed very different paths in the two halves of the Mediterranean. In the earlier gradual conquest of Italy and then the western Mediterranean, Rome had to fight a number of extended wars, such as those against the Samnites and Carthage. Furthermore, in some of those wars, Rome's very existence was threatened.
- ◆ When the wars were over, at least in Italy, Rome bestowed some degree of citizenship, or at least allied status, on their defeated foes, who were then integrated into Roman society. The main obligation placed upon them was to supply troops to Rome's military. Rome imposed their culture on the defeated.
- ◆ By contrast, in the east, the wars tended to be short, and Rome itself was never seriously threatened. These were wars of expansion, not survival. In the east, the conquered regions had to pay large cash indemnities, or were transformed into taxpaying provinces under Roman administrators, and citizenship was only bestowed on a very restricted basis. The main obligation was to provide income, not troops.
- ◆ The eastern conquests brought both Greek culture and great wealth to Rome. As for those defeated in the east, the principal effects of Roman imperialism upon them were devastation, oppression, exploitation, looting, and enslavement.

PROBLEMS OF ADMINISTRATION

- ◆ By the 3rd century B.C., the strains of trying to run an empire using the political structure of a city were beginning to show. Most urgently, there was a severe shortage of magistrates within the existing system who could be employed to act as governors of the new provinces that the Romans were establishing.
- ◆ While it might seem obvious that the solution was to create a new post—that of a governor—that would have been too radical an innovation for the Romans. Instead, they found a way to stretch the current system. They did this by extending the power of some of the annual magistrates for an additional year or more without them actually holding the office. This process of extending magisterial authority was called *prorogation*.
- ◆ Another quirk of the administrative system that developed during this time was that sometimes the Roman government would not actually directly involve itself in the collection of taxes. Instead, it would sell contracts to private associations of businessmen called *publicans*, who would submit bids to the government.
- ◆ The *publicans* would have a set amount of time to go out to a specific region and collect taxes. If they could collect more than they had bid, they made a profit. As you can imagine, this led to a great deal of exploitation and brutality, and *publicans* were not popular with the provincials.

ARTS AND CULTURE

- ◆ As the conquest of the Greek east proceeded, Roman officers were exposed to the Greeks' sophisticated culture, with all of its remarkable achievements in literature, art, theater, architecture, and philosophy. Like many other civilizations who had come into contact with Greek culture, the Romans were very impressed by it.
- ◆ The Romans brought Greek culture back with them to Rome in the very literal form of stolen manuscripts and artwork, which they used to adorn their houses and gardens. A staggering number of Greek statues, vases,

paintings, and other decorative objects were looted from Greece and relocated to Rome. Greek culture was also imported to Rome in the form of the Greeks themselves.

- ◆ Thousands of formerly free Greeks were enslaved and shipped to Italy. Many of them ended up laboring on plantations in the countryside, but others, especially those who possessed skills such as literacy or medical training, ended up in the cities, where their talents were employed to serve their new masters. Others became household slaves, frequently acting as tutors to the children of wealthy Roman families.



- ◆ Another incentive for adopting Greek culture was that it offered a new arena for status competition among Roman aristocrats. These men were always eager to find a new way to distinguish themselves from their peers, and they now began to compete to see who could conspicuously display the best knowledge of Greek culture. For children of the Roman elite, education began to include learning to read and write Greek, memorizing long passages from Homer, and studying the writings of Greek philosophers.
- ◆ It soon became stylish and desirable to be able to casually drop quotes from Greek authors and thinkers into your conversations, speeches, and letters. Any self-respecting Roman aristocrat now had to show his sophistication by assembling a collection of Greek art and displaying it around his home. Horace was indeed correct that, while Rome conquered Greece politically, Greek culture conquered Rome.

EFFECTS OF IMPERIALISM

- ◆ Roman imperialism created a vicious circle that ultimately made almost every segment of Roman society unhappy and resentful. Here's how it worked: The Roman army was supposed to be a militia of citizens serving short terms, but the reality is that constant wars forced people to serve long terms. Service in the army was not open to all citizens, but rather only to those who met a certain wealth qualification, which was usually achieved by owning land.
- ◆ Military service soon began to disrupt the economy, as men who had to leave their farms for such a long period of time often ended up losing the farms, because they were not there to maintain them. In addition, many poor people heard stories about the riches acquired by some soldiers, and so voluntarily sold their farms in order to join the army, with dreams of making their fortunes.
- ◆ While a few soldiers did come back fabulously wealthy, overwhelmingly, the average legionary did not come home a rich man. Ultimately, thousands of veterans returned to Italy after having served their country for many years without anything to show for it, and having lost their

farms. Many of these veterans ended up flocking to the city of Rome in the hope of finding some form of employment, where they hung around, bitter and idle.

- ◆ With the influx of former legionaries in the capital city, the population of Rome reached the phenomenal size of approximately 1 million people by the 1st century B.C. An unforeseen long-term consequence of Roman imperialism, therefore, was the disruption and loss of small family farms. This was a serious problem, if you keep in mind that the small-time family farmer—the soldier/citizen/farmer ideal exemplified by Cincinnatus—had been the backbone of Rome, which greatly contributed to its rise.
- ◆ Meanwhile, successful generals were returning to Italy with great wealth, but what could one do with such wealth? You could hoard it, but that doesn't do much for you. You could give it away, and many aristocrats did just this, sometimes building massive public works and donating them to the state to enhance their status. Finally, you could invest. But what is there to invest in?
- ◆ There was no stock market in Rome, and you couldn't buy mutual funds, or government bonds. The one thing you could buy, however, was land. And just as many aristocrats loaded with cash were looking for land to buy, there were all these small family farms being sold, or falling into debt and being auctioned off. So they bought them up. The completely unintended consequence of this sequence of events was that the Italian countryside and the entire economy of Italy were profoundly changed, from a vast number of tiny, private family farms, to a small number of gigantic, plantation-like estates owned by just a few rich men.



- ◆ Another intensely unhappy stratum of Roman society was that of the half-citizens and allies in Italy. These were the people who, for centuries, had been providing much of the manpower that enabled Rome to win its wars. These were the ones who had faithfully stayed loyal to Rome even in its darkest moments. By the 2nd century B.C., they felt that they deserved to get full Roman citizenship.
- ◆ In this, the half-citizens and allies were totally correct; they did deserve full citizenship, and had amply earned it. The Romans, however, were mired in tradition, and dragged their feet in extending Roman citizenship. As a result, Rome's once-loyal allies also became angry and embittered.
- ◆ Others who were dissatisfied with Roman imperialism included the millions of slaves who had lost their freedom, been robbed, displaced from their homelands, and shipped off to Italy to work for the Romans. Obviously and justifiably, they were extremely resentful and unhappy. Finally, there were all the areas conquered by Rome, which had lost their independence and now labored under heavy tax burdens.

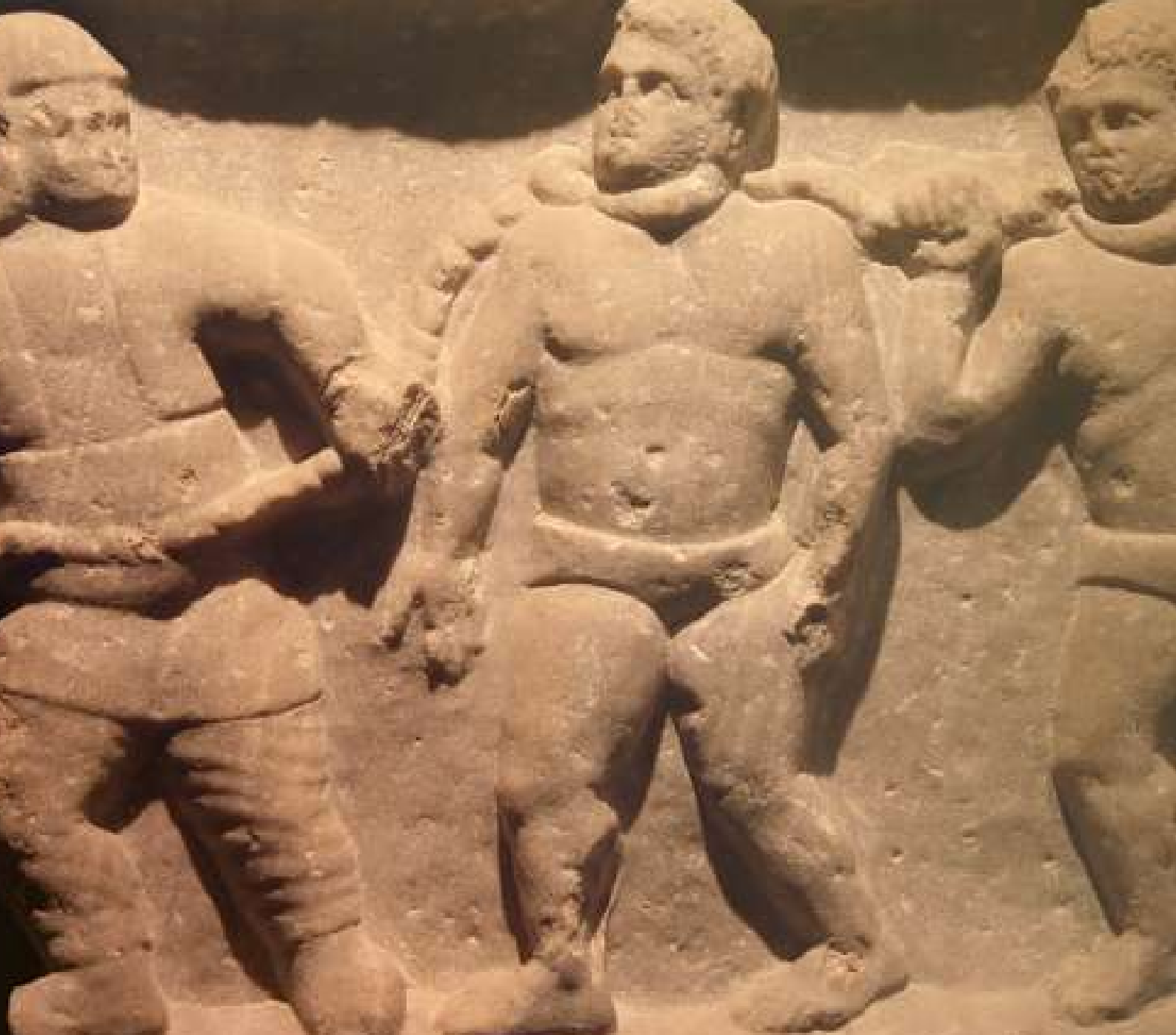
Suggested Reading

Astin, *The Cambridge Ancient History*.

Gruen, *The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome*.

Questions to Consider

- ✦ In the long run, do you believe that Rome's incorporation of Greek culture will exercise a positive or a negative effect on their civilization?
- ✦ Of the various internal tensions produced by Roman imperialism, which one do you think will prove the most destructive to the Roman Republic?



ROMAN SLAVERY: CRUELTY AND OPPORTUNITY

LECTURE 12

In a study of ancient slavery, a famous historian once argued that, although the institution of slavery itself has been present in innumerable civilizations going back to the very earliest cities in Mesopotamia, in all of human history there have been only five genuine slave societies—meaning ones whose economy was fundamentally dependent upon slave labor. One of these, of course, was classical Rome.

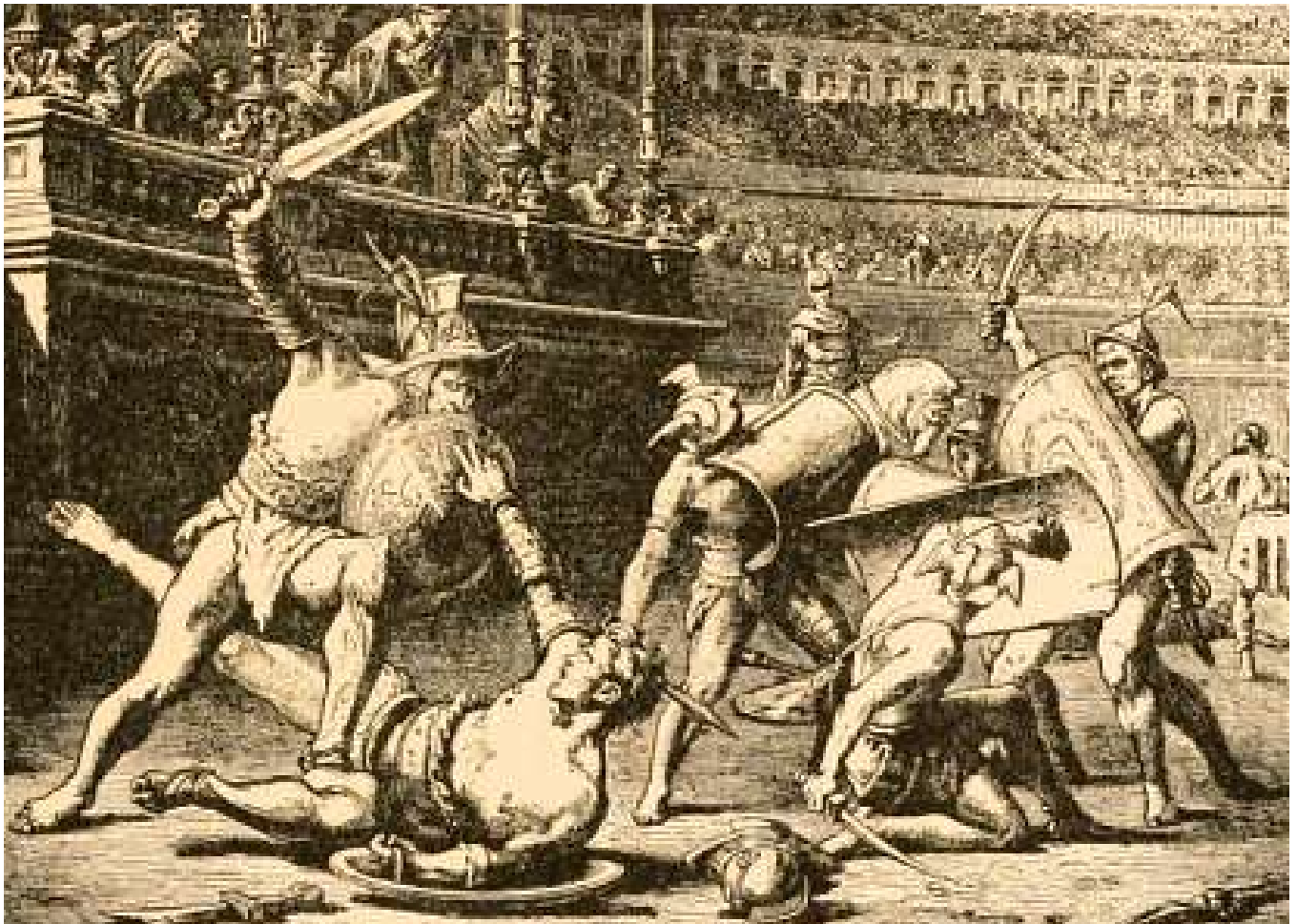
IMPORTANT DISTINCTIONS

- ◆ It is important to point out some key differences between slavery in the Roman world and slavery as we today, especially Americans, usually conceive of it. When we think of slavery, we tend to imagine the particular form that was practiced in the American South. Roman slavery was a very different institution, for a number of reasons.
- ◆ The first and by far the biggest difference between Roman slavery and slavery as we often think of it is that Roman slavery was not racial slavery. Slaves were any and all races, genders, cultures, and ages.
- ◆ A second major difference was that the line between slave and free person was not rigid, as in the more familiar later types of slavery. In the Roman world, slavery was a permeable boundary through which people passed in large numbers in both directions.
- ◆ What unites all forms of slavery, however, is the basic fact that it is an institution which strips human beings of their essential humanity, and treats them instead as objects. Under Roman law, slaves were regarded as pieces of property, just like any other item that was owned by their master.

SLAVE ORIGINS

- ◆ The most common source of slaves in the Roman world was military conquest. Whenever a Roman army took the field, it was inevitably followed by a train of slave dealers. The soldiers would catch people, club them over the head, and sell them on the spot to the slave dealers, who in turn would send them to one of the great slave markets, such as the strategically located islands along trade routes.

- ◆ The numbers of slaves generated by Rome's wars were truly astounding. Even Rome's early wars produced large numbers of slaves. The Third Samnite War at the beginning of the 3rd century B.C. resulted in 55,000 Samnites and Gauls being taken captive and then sold into slavery. Rome's destruction of Carthage in the Third Punic War flooded the slave markets with hundreds of thousands of new slaves at once.
- ◆ Another important source was the children born of slaves, who inherited their parents' servile status. Scholars have spent a lot of time arguing about whether Roman slavery was self-sustaining through slaves reproducing, or if it had to be replenished by military conquest or other mechanisms that would provide a constant influx of new slaves.
- ◆ Early in Roman history, it was possible for free citizens who had fallen into debt, and were unable to pay it off, to become slaves. Free people could also become slaves as the result of legal action; for example, if they were convicted of certain crimes, the judge might condemn them to slavery.



- ◆ It was not uncommon for unwanted babies to be exposed after birth, and most sizable towns seem to have had an informally recognized location where such babies were abandoned. Slave dealers regularly passed by these spots and collected these babies, who were then raised as slaves. Finally, desperate free people could actually voluntarily sell members of their family, or even themselves, into slavery.
- ◆ At times when the market was glutted with captives, an unskilled adult male slave might sell for around 2,000 sesterces—perhaps roughly equivalent to two years' worth of the Roman version of minimum wage. Skilled slaves could sell for considerably more. Slaves could be bought outright, which was most common. Some dealers also rented slaves out for a certain time period, ranging from a few hours to an entire year.

SLAVE LIFESTYLES

- ◆ The lifestyle of Roman slaves could vary enormously. One significant distinction was between rural and urban slaves. Rural slaves tended to be unskilled farm workers, and their lives were often extremely harsh and exploitative. They were frequently chained together, and they spent their time doing heavy manual labor in the fields under the eyes of cruel overseers. At night, they were locked up in a small, often underground, jail-like enclosure known as an *ergastulum*. This type of slave was rarely freed by his master and had little to look forward to in life.
- ◆ Urban slavery encompassed a much wider range of experiences. Some slaves, particularly those assigned to menial tasks such as cleaning or carrying things, suffered through an existence similar to that of rural slaves. Other urban slaves, however—particularly household slaves—lived lives of considerably greater physical comfort, even if their status as property was the same. Some of these household slaves were raised together with the children of the master, and thus ended up being their childhood playmates and friends.

- ◆ In adulthood, household slaves might become the confidantes of their masters, and might receive similar educations, have their own families, and live nearly as well as the free members of the family. Many skilled professions, such as teacher, carpenter, doctor, and clerk, were often filled by slaves who enjoyed, at least to some degree, the high standard of living and the respect due to individuals with their talents.
- ◆ Wealthy Roman households could have an array of slaves, each performing a narrowly specialized task. There were doormen, hairdressers, valets, personal doctors, tutors, porters, kennel masters, and slaves to carry litters and umbrellas. The serving of meals might employ several slaves to carry dishes, others to remove them, yet more to serve wine, and one slave to do nothing but slice meat. Preparing the food might also require a legion of chefs.
- ◆ Many of these slaves, especially those who possessed a skill or talent, harbored the hope that they might actually buy their freedom from their masters through an odd Roman institution known as the *peculium*. A *peculium* was a fund of money that the slave was allowed to build up; once it reached his or her own value, the slave could give it to the master and literally buy their way out of slavery. A slave might also use it to purchase the freedom of his spouse or children.



- ◆ The *peculium* was viewed by the Romans as an incentive for slaves to work harder. Thus, a master might tell a slave who was a teacher that he could keep a percentage of all the tuition money that he generated, or inform a slave who worked as a salesman that he could keep a percentage of the profits from his sales. One calculation suggests that it would take a particularly industrious and thrifty slave roughly seven years to buy his or her freedom.
- ◆ A sizable number of urban slaves were also freed outright by their masters. The act of freeing a slave was known as manumission. It most commonly occurred either posthumously in a will, or when a man became a paterfamilias and freed his childhood slave friends. So many Romans were freeing slaves in their wills that eventually a law was passed prohibiting anyone from freeing more than 100 slaves in a will.

Suggested Reading

Bradley, *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World*.
———, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire*.
Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman World*.

Questions to Consider

- ✦ Was the form of slavery practiced by the Romans better in any way than that found in the Pre–Civil War United States, or are such distinctions meaningless when compared to the fundamental fact of people being treated as objects?
- ✦ What insights into Roman culture and values are revealed by the way that they assigned names?



ROMAN WOMEN AND MARRIAGE

LECTURE 13

A major obstacle to studying the lives of Roman women is the problem of surviving sources. The sources available to us were all authored by men; as a result, nearly everything we know about Roman women is filtered through the lens of how Roman men viewed them. We have almost nothing that records the true thoughts, feelings, or attitudes of Roman women. This lecture thus examines what historians think they know about the lives of Roman women.

STATUS

- ◆ One of the most revered and powerful figures in Roman society was the *paterfamilias*—literally, “father of the family”—who was the oldest living male in a Roman household. The *paterfamilias* wielded *patria potestas* (“paternal power”) over all the members of his extended family, including adults, children, and slaves.
- ◆ In the most extreme example, a *paterfamilias* had the power to put to death his own children. He arranged marriages for his children, and he could command them to divorce; he could sell members of his family into slavery; and he could order a newborn baby to be abandoned. He was truly the ultimate authority figure.
- ◆ Women did not have equal legal status with men. By law, Roman girls and women were almost always under the jurisdiction of a male, whether a *paterfamilias*, a husband, or a legally appointed guardian. Over the course of her life, a woman might pass from the control of one male to another—most typically, from father to husband.
- ◆ Despite their inferior legal status, Roman mothers were expected to be strong figures within the household, to play an important role in supervising the upbringing and education of children, and to maintain the smooth day-to-day running of the household. Above all, the Roman wife was expected to be self-effacing and to provide strong support for, but not any challenge to, the *paterfamilias*.

- ◆ Roman women in poor families often had to work hard, just like the men in the family. Most women's day-to-day lives were thus not significantly different from men's, although legally, they were accorded inferior status. Women could not vote in elections or run for political office, and, with a few exceptions, were not permitted to take part in the speechmaking and debates that characterized Roman civic life.
- ◆ The one area in which a few women routinely held significant public positions was religion. There were certain rituals, especially those involving female deities, that the Romans believed had to be performed by women. There were several established priesthoods whose members were all female, such as the Vestal Virgins.
- ◆ Upper-class girls were raised almost entirely within the household, rarely venturing outside the house itself. The chief figure in their lives was their mother, who supervised whatever education they received. In terms of reading, writing, and literature, the education that these girls obtained varied enormously from house to house.
- ◆ There are a few famous examples of highly educated women, but on the whole—and especially during the early and middle Republic—excessive knowledge or intellectual ability in women was regarded with suspicion and disfavor. The main focus of a girl's education was to learn how to spin thread and weave clothing.

MARRIAGE

- ◆ Upper-class girls typically led sheltered lives, and many may have hardly left their home before their marriage. Most aristocratic women were probably married off in their mid-teens, and a woman who was not wed by the age of 20 was considered a deviant. The emperor Augustus would later formalize this judgment by passing a law that heavily penalized any woman over the age of 20 who was unmarried.

- ◆ The man that a girl wed was selected by her father, usually for economic or political reasons. Notably, the Romans allowed marriages between closer family members than we would. It was permissible for first cousins to marry, for example, and from the early empire on, uncles could even marry their nieces.
- ◆ Roman law did not recognize a marriage with a foreigner, a slave, or a freedman. Also, until fairly late in Roman history, Roman soldiers were not allowed to marry. It was nonetheless common for soldiers to form lasting relationships with women, and for the two to live together and consider themselves a couple. Women could not inherit from soldiers, however, and any children soldiers had were considered illegitimate.



- ◆ Making a marriage legally binding was a very simple process. The only requirement was that there be a public statement of intent. Marriage was viewed as a religious duty whose goal was to produce children, thus insuring that the family gods would continue to be worshipped.
- ◆ During most of the republic, the most common form of marriage was known as a manus marriage. In this type of marriage, the woman was regarded as a piece of property that passed from the hand of her father to that of her husband. The woman had no rights, and any property she had was under the control of her husband.
- ◆ While a legally binding marriage could consist of merely a statement of intent, there were many rituals commonly performed to mark the occasion symbolically. For example, the bride-to-be would typically dedicate her childhood toys to the household gods, signifying that she was making the transition from child to woman.
- ◆ During the wedding ceremony—which was common, although not required to make the marriage legal—various sacrifices would be performed in front of a gathering of friends and relatives. A feast would usually follow the ceremony, with the bride and groom sitting side by side.

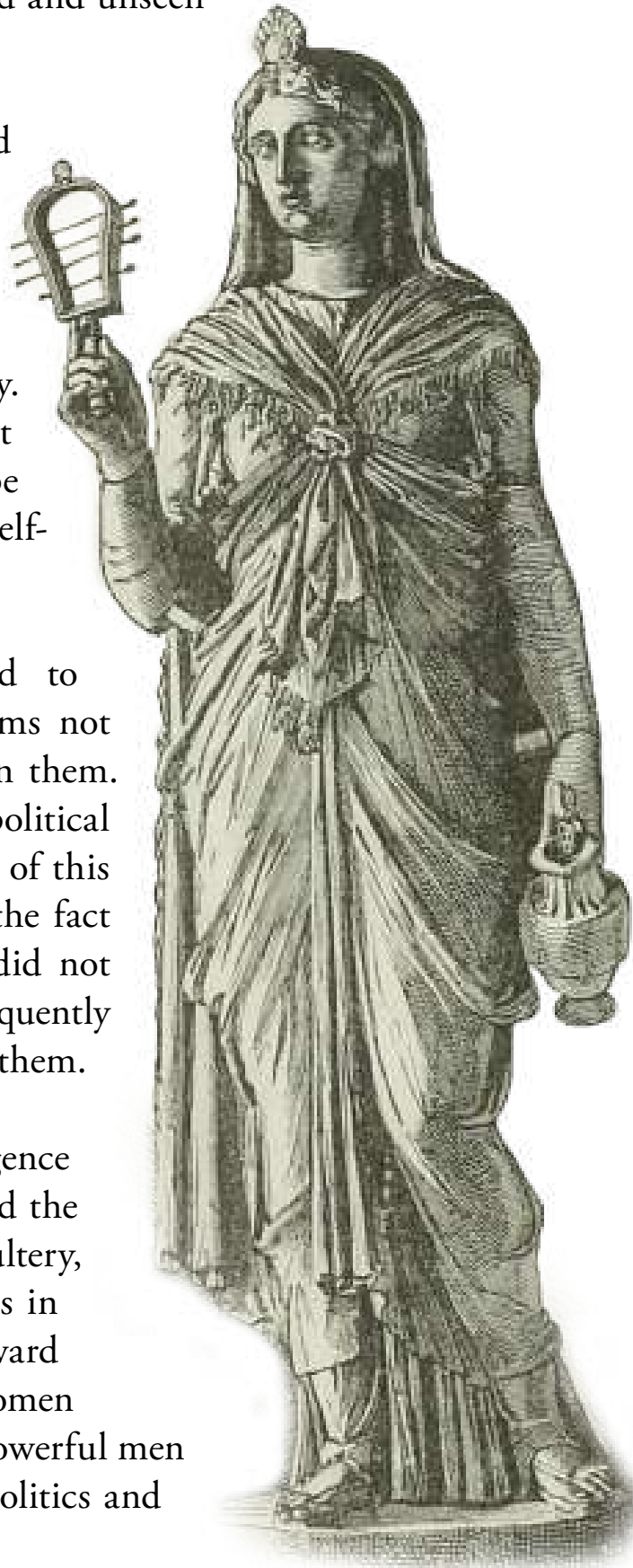
FAMILY

- ◆ The main duty of a Roman wife was to produce children. Unsurprisingly, however, because some women were married before they were physically mature, many young wives died of complications during childbirth.
- ◆ One of the main sources of information on Roman women is their tombstones. Many of these record the sad stories of girls who were married at 12 or 13 years of age, gave birth five or six times, then died in childbirth before they reached the age of 20.



- ◆ Tombstones are also the best guide to what Roman men considered the ideal qualities of a wife. Some of the most common positive attributes used by husbands to describe their deceased wives include chastity, obedience, friendliness, frugality, contentment at home, piety, simple dress, and skill at spinning thread and weaving cloth.
- ◆ One way that Roman men were praised on their tombstones was to say that they treated their wives kindly, with the implication that such kindness was unnecessary and perhaps even unusual. In a manus marriage, for example, a husband could beat his wife with impunity, and was expected to do so if she “misbehaved.”
- ◆ Divorce was as easy as marriage. All a couple had to do was declare that they were getting divorced, and they were. There was often pressure for women to remarry, especially if they were still of prime childbearing age.

- ◆ A woman was supposed to spend most of her time within the confines of the household. When upper-class women did venture out of the house—to visit the marketplace, the baths, temples, or female friends—they were often transported in curtained litters carried by slaves, both to avoid the filth in the streets and to stay concealed and unseen in public.
- ◆ Women were supposed to be modest and chaste. A Roman matron's clothing was intended to cover her completely, and statues frequently depict women making a specific gesture meant to communicate their *pudicitia*, or modesty. Fidelity to one's husband was crucial. It was considered wrong for a woman to be avaricious, ambitious, ostentatious, or self-promoting.
- ◆ Husbands and wives were obligated to produce children, but there often seems not to have been a lot of affection between them. Marriage was seen as a social and political relationship, not a romantic one. Some of this lack of warmth was no doubt due to the fact that many Roman men and women did not themselves choose their spouses, and frequently there was a vast age difference between them.
- ◆ There was, of course, a degree of divergence between the ideal behavior of wives and the reality. Some women did commit adultery, and sometimes divorced their husbands in order to marry others. Especially toward the end of the republic, a few notable women who were either married or related to powerful men were even able to have an impact on politics and government and exercise power.



- ◆ Comparatively little is known about the lives of lower-class women who had to work outside the home in order to help support their families or themselves. They might work as vendors in the marketplace, for example, or learn a trade. Women also commonly served as midwives, and as wet nurses in wealthy families. While women could not act onstage in theatrical productions, they could perform in mime and pantomime shows, and as musicians.
- ◆ Particular notoriety surrounded women who worked as innkeepers, waitresses, bartenders, maids, and cooks. There seems to have been an expectation that many of these workers would combine their duties with prostitution. Indeed, there are surviving bills from inns at which the itemized list includes charges for food, lodging, and the sexual services of the maids. Although prostitutes were looked down upon, prostitution itself was legal and was one of the careers open to poor women.

Suggested Reading

D'Ambra, *Roman Women*.

Fantham, *Women in the Classical World*.

Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome*.

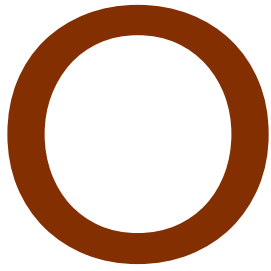
Questions to Consider

- ✎ How do the status of and expectations for women in Roman society compare to those found in other cultures and eras of history?
- ✎ Do Roman marriage rituals and customs make their culture seem more empathetic and familiar, or more incomprehensible and alien?



ROMAN CHILDREN, EDUCATION, AND TIMEKEEPING

LECTURE 14



ne of the greatest differences between the ancient world and modern industrialized societies is the decline in infant mortality. In ancient Rome, roughly one-third of babies did not survive their first year of life. The mortality rate prior to puberty was as high as 50 percent. Every parent would probably have endured the deaths of about half of his or her children, and every adult the deaths of half of his or her siblings. It is impossible to judge what psychological effects these experiences had on Romans, but it would certainly have affected one's outlook on life.

BOYS AND GIRLS

- ◆ When a child was born, it was placed on the floor in front of the father. If it was a boy, and the father wanted to acknowledge it as his son, he would pick it up. This action meant that he agreed to accept it as his own son and to raise it.
- ◆ If it was a girl, the father would not pick it up; he would simply instruct one of the women, either his wife or a slave, to feed it. If, for whatever reason, he did not want it, he would leave it on the floor and the baby would be taken outside and abandoned.
- ◆ Romans thought that in order to produce strong children and soldiers, it was important not to be too nice to babies. Babies were therefore bathed in cold water, and all throughout childhood, they were forbidden to take warm baths, for fear that it would make them soft.
- ◆ For the first several months of life, a Roman baby would be tightly wrapped in cloth so that it could not move, with its arms and legs tied to sticks so that they could not be bent. Eventually they freed the right arm but not the left, in an attempt to make sure the baby would grow up right-handed, because left-handedness was regarded as unlucky.
- ◆ Men would often instruct their wives to breastfeed not only their own children but the slave children as well, the idea being that when they grew up, the slave children would be unusually loyal to their master because they had all been raised on the same milk.

- ◆ Babies suffering pains from teething had sheep's brains rubbed on their gums, which was thought to soothe the discomfort. Alternatively, they were sometimes given magic amulets containing a gritty substance derived from the horns of snails.
- ◆ Roman law defined childhood as the period between birth and age 12 for a girl, and between birth and age 14 for a boy. A Roman boy was known as a *puer*. The symbol of his childhood was his clothing, known as a *toga praetexta*, which was a toga with a purple stripe along the edge.
- ◆ Roman boys were expected to be tough, and were forbidden from eating lying down, which was the mark of an adult. Boys were also not allowed to get much sleep, because it was believed that too much sleep decreased intelligence and stunted growth.
- ◆ The term for a girl was *puella*, although this term was also sometimes used for adult women who had not given birth or were still virgins. All children, both free and slave, grew up together and played together. This often led personal slaves to be genuinely loyal to and fond of their masters; they were, after all, old childhood playmates.

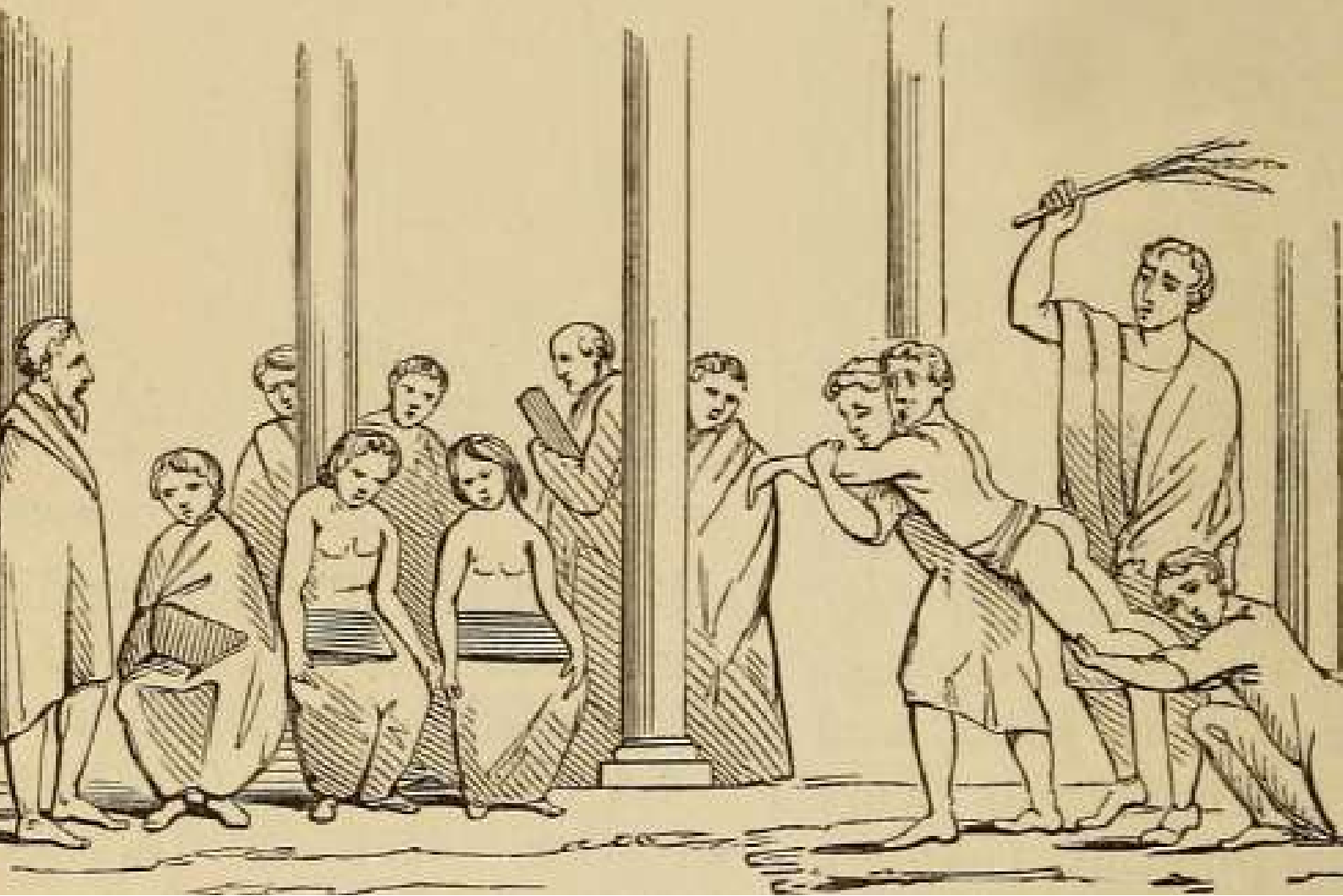


- ◆ Like children in almost any era and society, Roman boys and girls played with a variety of toys. Balls and hoops were perennially popular. Roman children engaged in such timeless activities as building sandcastles, spinning tops, and skimming rocks across the surface of water.
- ◆ Children played with small clay, wood, or even bronze figurines, including representations of animals, soldiers, and gladiators. A variety of dolls have been found, ranging from crude stuffed bundles of cloth to elaborate wooden or ivory manikins with articulated joints. Children also had pets, such as birds, dogs, and rabbits.

STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

- ◆ In traditional Roman society, and particularly before Rome's overseas conquests, education was conducted by the father, who taught his sons whatever he thought was necessary. In this period, a basic level of literacy and military training was the totality of education deemed useful. More formal education was primarily restricted to male children of the elites. Girls would have been instructed in spinning, weaving, and household management.
- ◆ The great change in Roman education happened, as did so many other major changes, when Rome conquered Greece. Exposure to Greek literature and culture raised expectations of what an aristocrat should know. They would now be expected to know both Greek and Latin, to be familiar with the literature of both cultures, and to be able to give formal orations in public.
- ◆ The hundreds of thousands of Greek citizens who were enslaved by Rome provided a ready source of teachers. From this time on, the structure of Roman education was that the student passed through a series of teachers. The highest goal, toward which each Roman student's education was aimed, was to produce an eloquent speaker.

- ◆ The first teacher was known as the *paedagogus*. This was a household slave to whom young boys, and occasionally girls, were entrusted. Ideally, the *paedagogus* was an educated Greek slave who could give the child his preliminary instruction in Latin and Greek. Technically, the main duty of the *paedagogus* was to look after and protect the child. Thus, whenever the boy went out in public, he was always accompanied by his *paedagogus*.
- ◆ Another task of the *paedagogus* was to restrain and discipline mischievous children, usually either by twisting their ears or beating them with a cane. Depending on their relationship, Romans tended to look back on their *paedagogus* with either fondness or hatred. There are many examples of men who, once they became adults, freed their old tutor out of gratitude.
- ◆ Around the age of six or seven, the student began to attend a more formal type of school. The new teacher was not a household member, but rather a man who made individual contracts with parents to instruct their children in reading, writing, and arithmetic. He was known as the *litterator*.
- ◆ Often, a boy would progress through a series of *litteratores*. He might learn basic reading, writing, and counting from one, more sophisticated knowledge of the same subject from a second, and then literature from a third.
- ◆ A teacher of the more advanced levels was called a *grammaticus*. On a typical school day, classes began at dawn, and boys had to get up long before this, get dressed, eat a simple breakfast, and then, accompanied by their *paedagogi*, walk to school. If the boy was very young, he might be carried on the slave's shoulders.
- ◆ There were no actual school buildings, so classes might be conducted anywhere. A teacher might rent a shop or an apartment, or set up school in a corner of the forum or in a colonnade. This would certainly have made for a distracting academic environment; the teacher and students might find themselves trying to hold classes surrounded by the bustle of people buying and selling, and of officials conducting state business and trials.



- ◆ One Roman source describes the method for teaching young children how to form the letters of the alphabet. A wooden board would be prepared, with the letters carved deeply into its surface. Children would take a pointed metal cylinder called a *stilus* and trace the letters, following the grooves.
- ◆ Texts were extremely expensive and fragile, and only the teacher would likely have any. Much of Roman education consisted of the teacher reading aloud from texts while the students memorized long passages by heart. Classes lasted from dawn until noon, with breaks for holidays and summer vacation.
- ◆ The two main characteristics of this phase of schooling were endless amounts of memorization, reinforced by brutal beatings whenever a student failed to perform properly. The teacher had a wide range of punishments available. The most common and simplest was to strike a student's hands with a cane made of reeds. For more egregious offenses, the teacher might would beat the student's body with a whip consisting of multiple strips of leather.

- ◆ The ultimate punishment available to the teacher was the *catomus*, in which the student was stripped naked and stretched across the backs of two other students, one of whom would grasp his legs, and the other his arms. The teacher then flogged the unfortunate victim with a wooden stick.



- ◆ The last couple years of a student's instruction focused on literature, particularly on Homer and on Roman historical literature, such as Virgil. This phase of education usually ended around 13 years of age. There were no colleges or universities, but the wealthiest, most ambitious, or most promising students might go on to a third class of instructor known as the *rheto*r. The *rheto*r was a specialist in training students to be effective public speakers.

TIMES AND DATES

- ◆ Like most cultures, the Romans placed importance on the key chronological stages of a person's life—birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood—and marked the transition from one state to the next through customs and rituals. But a complex society needs many other ways of ordering, structuring, and measuring time. Farmers, for example, need to know when to plant their crops.
- ◆ For the Romans, each day was divided into two periods: the time when it was light outside, and the time when it was dark. Each of these periods was then subdivided into 12 hours. Superficially, this sounds a lot like our modern system of 24-hour days.
- ◆ There was one rather significant difference between our days and Roman days, however: Roman hours were not of a fixed length. Rather, they were equivalent to the amount of light or darkness on a given day divided by 12. Meetings could therefore be scheduled only very approximately.
- ◆ One of the most common tools that the Romans employed to measure the passage of time, the sundial, was based on the daily motion of the sun. A sundial might consist of nothing more complex than a stick placed in the ground to crudely track the progress of the sun, or it could be an elaborate marble shell with curved paths carved into it that corresponded to the progress of the gnomon's shadow.
- ◆ For situations such as limiting how long a speaker in a court case could talk, the Romans sometimes used water clocks, in which a given amount of water would take a known amount of time to drip out.

- ◆ Like us, the Romans divided the year into 12 months. During the republic, they only had 355 days in a year. As a result, the calendar would get severely out of line with the natural seasons after a few years. If left uncorrected for long enough, this could have disastrous consequences for farmers; if they went by the calendar, it would lead to their planting crops at the wrong time of year.
- ◆ Every so often, Roman priests would declare an intercalary month, which was inserted between two existing months in order to bring the months back into line with the natural seasons. There was no set timetable for inserting intercalary months, and the calendar could get far out of alignment if, in a time of crisis, for example, the priestly colleges were not regularly meeting.
- ◆ The Roman calendar was reformed by Julius Caesar in the late stages of the Roman Republic. Caesar added 10 days to the calendar, thus making a year 365 days long. To take care of the extra one-quarter of a day, he instituted the leap year, with one extra day added every four years. This reformed calendar, known as the Julian calendar, is pretty much the same one we use today.
- ◆ The modern English names of the months of the year are all derived from the names used by the Romans. Specifically, the original Roman names were *Januarius*, *Februarius*, *Martius*, *Aprilis*, *Maius*, *Junius*, *Quintilis*, *Sextilis*, *September*, *October*, *November*, and *December*.
- ◆ Several of the month names refer to Roman gods. *January*, for example, is named after the Roman god Janus. From *Quintilis* through *December*, the names were derived from numbers. *December* was the tenth month rather than the twelfth, because Romans originally began each year with March rather than January. Later in Roman history, the fifth and sixth months were renamed *Julius* and *Augustus* to honor Julius Caesar and the emperor Augustus.

- ◆ The Romans picked three days of each month, gave them special names, and indicated all other days by their relationship to these three. The first day of each month was known as the kalends. The day of the month on which the moon was full was called the ides, which usually fell on a day toward what we think of as the middle of the month. The nones was the day nine days before the ides.

Suggested Reading

Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome*.

Harlow and Laurence, *Growing Up and Growing Old in Ancient Rome*.

Questions to Consider

- ✎ How do you think the experiences of Roman childhood and education shaped the attitudes of Roman adults?
- ✎ How would the Romans' methods of timekeeping influence how they viewed the world around them? Consider especially living in a world without a readily available way to precisely measure time during the day.



FOOD, HOUSING, AND EMPLOYMENT IN ROME

LECTURE 15

Food, housing, and employment are truly foundational requirements, and this lecture will discuss each in turn. As you proceed, you will see what was available to the typical Roman with respect to food, housing, and employment, and what attitudes the Romans had toward these basic necessities.

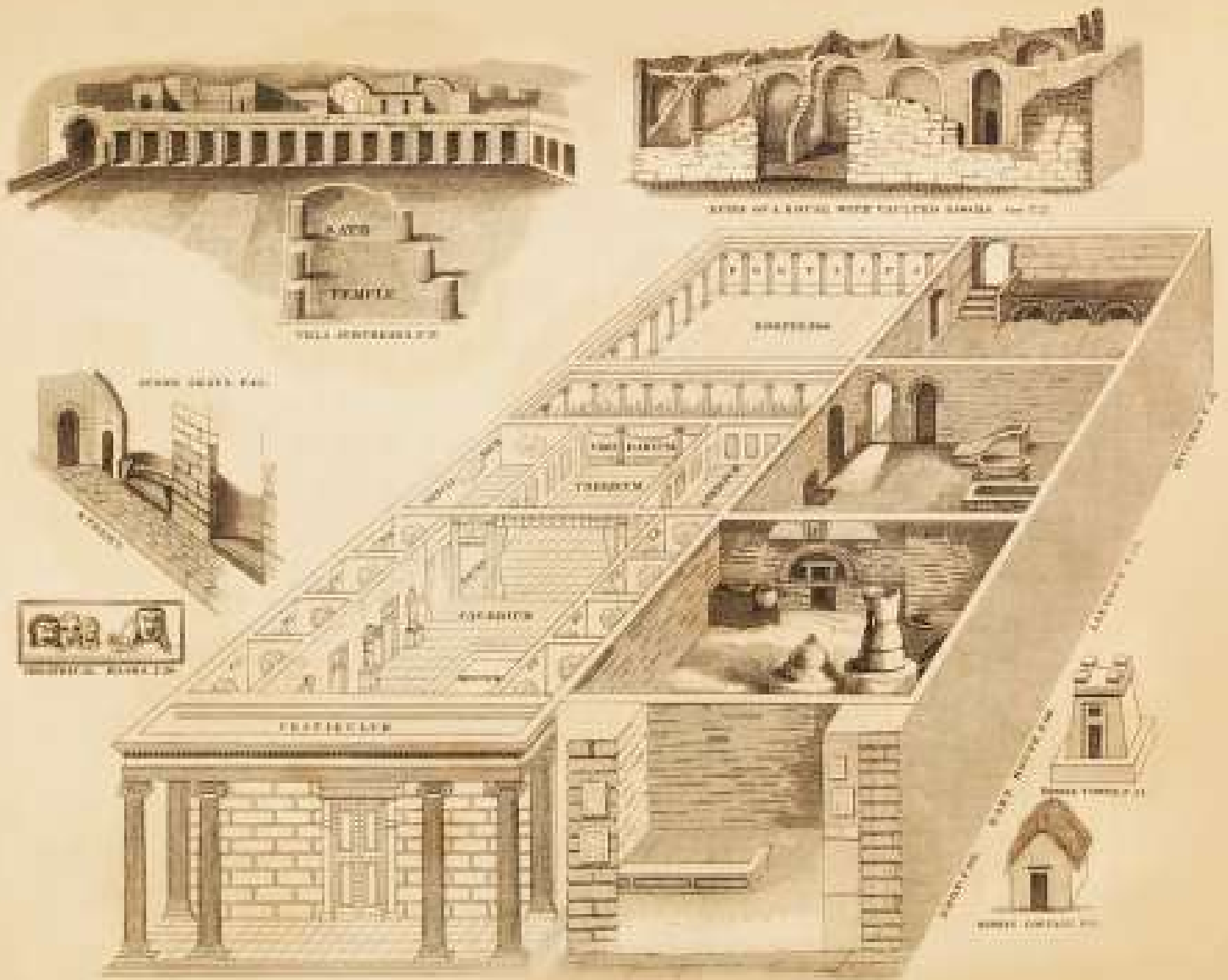
SETTING THE TABLE

- ◆ The traditional view of the diet consumed by the vast majority of inhabitants of the ancient Roman world is that it consisted of three main food items: grain, olive oil, and wine.
- ◆ The grain most commonly grown was wheat, but the Romans also cultivated barley and other cereal crops. These were usually consumed either as bread or as a kind of porridge or gruel.
- ◆ Estimates derived from ancient evidence and studies of the diets of rural Mediterranean peasants at the dawn of the 20th century suggest that as much as 80 percent of the caloric intake of about 80 percent of Romans may have come from grain, olive oil, and wine.
- ◆ Recent scholarship has begun to complicate this monotonous picture, proposing that a greater variety of foods was eaten. Even if the percentages creep down a bit, however, these three staples certainly formed a large part of the typical Roman's diet.
- ◆ One characteristic shared by these items that made them attractive to cultivate is that all three could be preserved for a substantial period of time and then eaten later. The grain/olive oil/wine diet would have been supplemented by seasonal fruits and vegetables, when they could be obtained. Meat, especially red meat, would have been a rarity.
- ◆ Pork was the most readily available meat product, and appears to have been quite popular with the Romans. Where available, fish was also greatly enjoyed. Adding some flavor to this diet was a kind of fish sauce called *garum* that seems to have been much loved by the Romans.

- ◆ While the culinary lives of most Romans were monotonous, it was a different story for rich, upper-class Romans. Their wealth enabled them to eat a vast array of exotic comestibles and to hold lavish banquets. Breakfast and lunch were usually light meals, while dinner was the principal meal of the day.
- ◆ At a formal Roman dinner party, the guests arrived, removed their shoes, and were led to a dining room called a triclinium. Romans lay down on couches when they ate, leaning on their left elbows.
- ◆ Romans used knives and spoons, but not forks. The first course of appetizers was little treats, such as olives, snails, vegetables, eggs, or shellfish. Main courses were elaborate meat dishes. Boar and sow's udders were very popular. A particular delicacy was eels and lampreys.
- ◆ Many Roman aristocrats owned heated fishponds in which eels were raised, and they competed to see who could grow the biggest and tastiest ones. Dessert consisted of nuts and fruit, such as apples, pears, and figs.
- ◆ There might be entertainment at a banquet, such as music, jugglers, magicians, actors, or a literary reading of poetry or history. After dinner was eaten, there would be drinking and conversation. The host would determine the ratio of wine to water that would be served, and would often select a topic of conversation.
- ◆ The Romans, like the Greeks, usually diluted their wine with water before drinking it. Romans also enjoyed some wines that were served warm, and these often had spices added to them. A popular hot wine was *mulsum*, which was sweetened with honey.

HOME SWEET HOME

- ◆ When it comes to housing, the experiences of Romans varied greatly according to economic status. The inhabitants of the countryside lived in houses made of stone or mud brick, often with several generations of the family sharing rooms with farm animals.



- ◆ Rich people in the city lived in a private house known as a domus. The wealthy also often owned sumptuous country villas. The majority of people living in Rome, however, rented apartments. Each domus only contained one family, but an apartment building could shelter hundreds.
- ◆ Roman houses in the city had few or no windows. From the outside, a house would have resembled a blank wall. The center of the house, and its focal point, was the atrium. This was usually a courtyard with a large opening in the ceiling to admit light. Adjacent to the atrium was a raised platform where the paterfamilias would sit when receiving visitors of lower status.

- ◆ The dining room, or triclinium, also usually opened onto the atrium. In the back of the house were a series of tiny rooms which functioned as the bedrooms. Each of these was called a *cubiculum*. The quarters for slaves and women were also at the rear of the house.
- ◆ Some Roman houses included a walled enclosure at the back that served as a garden. Roman houses were more or less the same range of sizes as modern houses, with the average house being around 2,000 square feet.
- ◆ The most obvious and famous feature of Roman houses was the lavish decoration of the walls and floors. Much of the expense and effort that in a modern home might be spent on furniture and decorative objects, the Romans directed toward ornamenting the structure itself.
- ◆ In many rooms, all four walls were plastered over and then completely covered in elaborate wall paintings, while the floors were coated with intricate mosaics. The palette of colors employed in Roman wall paintings was dominated by large expanses of black, gold, and blood red.



- ◆ Another focal point of ornamentation was the floors, which were covered with mosaics formed by taking very small cut pieces of colored stones and pressing them into wet mortar to form images ranging in complexity from simple black-and-white geometric patterns to astonishingly detailed color pictures.
- ◆ By current standards, Roman houses would have appeared surprisingly empty. Much of the basic furniture was made of wood or bronze. Romans could choose from an assortment of chairs, stools, and sofas with varying numbers of legs.
- ◆ In addition to furniture, smaller household objects would have included a full assortment of pots and pans, eating utensils, wood and wax tablets to write on, and olive oil–burning clay lamps, which brought light to dark interiors.
- ◆ The domus was not so much the dwelling of a nuclear family, but rather of an extended household comprising relatives, slaves, and servants. Roman homes do not seem to have had pronounced internal divisions among areas inhabited by men, women, and children, or even between master and slave, and standards of privacy were probably less than many modern people are accustomed to.
- ◆ The average urban Roman dwelt in apartment buildings called insulae, literally meaning “islands,” because of the way in which they often extended over an entire city block. Insulae were located all over the city of Rome, and some of the larger ones might have had 10 or more storeys.
- ◆ Because of the destruction caused by the collapse of poorly built insulae, laws were passed attempting to limit the height of insulae. Usually these limits were around 60 or 70 feet. Because such legislation was repeatedly passed, it suggests that these restrictions were routinely ignored.
- ◆ Insulae housed a wide variety of tenants of differing socioeconomic classes. The ground floor apartments would have been rented to the wealthiest tenants, who did not want to have to trudge up many flights of stairs to reach their dwellings.

- ◆ Often, the row of rooms opening onto the street were rented out as shops and small businesses. As you climbed up the levels of the insulae, the wealth of the tenants declined and the number of people per room increased.
- ◆ The least desirable rooms were located under the eaves of the roof, which frequently leaked and were plagued by vermin. A chamber pot served as a toilet, and despite legislation prohibiting such actions, full pots were routinely dumped out the window and into the street.
- ◆ Romans living in these apartments would have had a much more rudimentary set of possessions than what was owned by wealthy Romans in a domus. Their sum total of worldly goods may have consisted of nothing more than a few articles of clothing, bedding, footwear, a lamp, cookware and utensils, and perhaps some crude furniture.

IT'S A LIVING

- ◆ Employment for 80 to 90 percent of people in the Roman world simply meant being a farmer out in the countryside. The remaining population who were not in the army mostly lived in cities; for them, there was a variety of ways that they earned a living.
- ◆ The upper-class Romans who wrote all the surviving sources had very definite ideas about work and employment. They believed that most types of employment were morally degrading, and that truly civilized people should not work at all. Only those people who were so rich that they did not have to do anything to earn a living were considered fully human and civilized.
- ◆ The things that aristocrats did that we would consider jobs, like serving as a lawyer or being elected to a magistracy, such as praetor or consul, were not considered real jobs, because you received no pay. Politics and the law were truly the preserve of rich men, because they entailed spending a lot of money with no return.

- ◆ In keeping with the republican ideology of virtue exemplified by Cincinnatus, the only profession that did not degrade someone was farming. Rich men were expected to gain and maintain their wealth primarily by owning land. Of course, by the middle Republic, aristocrats did not do any actual farming themselves.



- ◆ This was the Romans' ideology, but in reality, the picture is more complex. Many rich Romans acquired their fortunes through means other than farming. Some were moneylenders who charged up to 60 percent annual interest on a loan. Some had shops that produced goods such as lamps, bricks, or clay plates and containers.
- ◆ While the upper classes could afford to be choosy about employment, the vast majority of people in cities had to work. The working classes can be divided into two basic groups: those whose profession required some sort of training, talent, skill, or capital, and those who were unskilled and sold their labor for wages.
- ◆ Skilled workers were often slaves or ex-slaves. In inscriptions on tombstones, approximately two-thirds of those who identify themselves as some sort of skilled worker are freedmen. Skilled work included manufacturing luxury items, making footwear, and providing specialized services to the rich.
- ◆ Although aristocrats regarded work and moneymaking with scorn, many freedmen seem to have taken great pride in their work. This can be seen most clearly on their tombstones, which often boasted a sculptural relief showing the deceased engaging in whatever profession he or she had practiced.
- ◆ Another way we know about Roman jobs is from trade associations called *collegia*. The members of a *collegium* would often put up monuments commemorating their accomplishments. The *collegia* also seemed to play a role in politics; much of the graffiti on Roman walls consists of *collegia* urging other people to vote for a certain politician.
- ◆ The lowest among the employed were the unskilled workers, called *mercenarii*, who had nothing to offer except their labor. They would hire themselves out in exchange for a salary to perform various menial jobs. This was considered the most degrading form of labor because Romans equated it to becoming someone's slave.

- ◆ A day's worth of work was known as an *opera*, and contracts would specify the number of days of his labor that a *mercenarius* was selling to an employer. The most common type of day labor job was simply to carry things around.
- ◆ A sizeable percentage of the free inhabitants of Rome would have found employment in two fields in particular: the supply of food and other commodities to Rome, and the construction industry. A single construction project of the emperor Claudius employed 30,000 men for 11 years as diggers.

Suggested Reading

Aldrete, *Daily Life in the Roman City*.

D'Arms, *Commerce and Social Standing in Ancient Rome*.

Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum*.

Wilkins and Nadeau, *A Companion to Food in the Ancient World*.

Questions to Consider

- ✦ What would you find to be the most unpleasant aspect about the options available to the typical Roman in terms of dining or housing?
- ✦ Do you agree or disagree with the attitude of Roman elites that there is something fundamentally demeaning about having to engage in business or to work for someone else?



THE GRACCHI ATTEMPT REFORM

LECTURE 16

The year 133 B.C. marks an important moment of transition in Roman history. It was the beginning of a tumultuous century during which tensions that had been building over hundreds of years would finally boil over, resulting in the violent collapse of the Roman Republic. Ironically, the inciting event was an attempt to save the state, and potentially to cure some of the serious problems that afflicted it.

THE GRACCHI

- ◆ The reform effort begun in 133 B.C. was initiated not by a disenfranchised outsider, nor by a member of one of the many unhappy and resentful groups in Roman society, but instead by two brothers, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, who were firmly embedded within what was then the most powerful, successful, and dominant family in Rome.
- ◆ The Gracchi brothers were the grandsons of the illustrious Scipio Africanus, who had defeated Hannibal during the Second Punic War. In more recent times, their father had been elected consul twice and censor once. They were part of the extended Aemilian clan, whose ranks populated many of the most important magistracies and generalships.
- ◆ By the late 2nd century B.C., Rome's spectacular achievement in conquering most of the Mediterranean had resulted in almost every segment of Roman society feeling resentful and unhappy.
- ◆ Some of the main disgruntled groups included veterans, who felt that they had not been rewarded for their service; poor Romans, many of whom had lost their family farms; Italians allies and half-citizens, who correctly felt that they were long overdue to be granted full Roman citizenship; aristocrats, who felt that the most powerful families were monopolizing government offices, and hence the routes to fame and fortune; and the conquered peoples themselves, many of whom now labored as slaves on large Italian plantations.

- ◆ The Gracchi brothers were among the very small group of Roman elites who had unambiguously benefitted from Roman imperialism, and thus were not members of any resentful group. Despite his privileged status, however, the elder Gracchi brother, Tiberius, apparently began to be concerned that the grievances of some of these groups were justified and that the republic would face a crisis if they were not addressed.
- ◆ In an attempt to do something about this dilemma, in 133 B.C., despite his aristocratic status, Tiberius ran for and was elected tribune of the plebs. One of the powers of this office was the ability to propose legislation directly to the citizen voting assemblies, the Comitia Centuriata and the Comitia Tributa. Accordingly, he proposed reviving and enforcing an existing law that had the practical effect of limiting the amount of land that any one person could own.



- ◆ Tiberius also proposed taking some of the territory that had been acquired by the Roman state in the course of its conquest and giving plots of this public land to poor Roman citizens who lacked any of their own, thereby transforming homeless people into productive farmers. These proposals were squarely aimed at trying to turn back the clock to a time before the emergence of large, slave-run plantations, to an era when Rome's economy was based on small family farms.
- ◆ What was radical about Tiberius's actions was not so much the proposals themselves—there were already similar initiatives underway—but that he bypassed the Senate and presented them directly to the voting assemblies of the people. To the Senate and the Roman elites that it represented, this end run around them was a move that threatened to rewrite the rules of power within the Roman Republic, to their loss and the people's gain.

THE OPPOSITION

- ◆ The situation surrounding Tiberius Gracchus's reforms escalated when the Senate allied with another tribune, who promised to use his veto power to block a vote on Tiberius's proposals. Traditionally, tribunician vetoes had been employed to nullify egregious actions of senatorial magistrates; to wield the veto power against a fellow tribune of the plebs in this way was unprecedented.
- ◆ Tiberius's response to this ploy was also unprecedented: He went back to the citizens and got them to vote to remove the other tribune from office. With his rival thus disposed of, the people voted to enact his agrarian reform proposals, including a land commission composed of Tiberius, his brother Gaius, and their father-in-law.
- ◆ The Senate then attempted to thwart Tiberius by utilizing its authority to control state expenditures. They simply refused to allocate any funds to the land commission to use to purchase or redistribute land. Fortuitously for Tiberius, however, right at this moment, the last King of Pergamum died without leaving any heirs. In his will, the king bequeathed his kingdom to Rome.

- ◆ Tiberius promptly put a proposal before the people's assembly that would divert the money from this legacy to the land commission. Not surprisingly, it passed. This act set yet another significant precedent, because the people were enacting laws that involved foreign affairs—an area that had traditionally been the prerogative of the Senate. Tiberius broke yet another tradition by announcing that he would run for reelection as tribune—normally a one-year magistracy—in order to continue his work and ensure that it was not undone.
- ◆ While both sides had been stretching tradition and the time-honored divisions of political power, the Senate's next move took things to a whole new level. At an assembly concerning the forthcoming tribunician election, a number of senators and their followers became enraged. Breaking up wooden benches to make clubs, they beat to death Tiberius and nearly 300 of his followers.
- ◆ This was a shocking event. Politicians at the highest level of Roman society were openly killing one another. Debate and discussion had been replaced by gang violence. Unfortunately, the murder of Tiberius Gracchus was an omen of the future, a symptom of the decline of the Roman Republic, as open violence would more and more frequently become a part of Roman politics over the next century.
- ◆ While clearly much of the opposition to Tiberius Gracchus was conservative reaction against his agrarian reform proposals, it is significant to note that the land commission was not dissolved after his death. Thus, at least for some aristocrats, the problem was not the proposals themselves, but rather jealousy over who should get the credit for them. Nevertheless, the agrarian reform process stagnated, not much was done, and 10 years went by with little having changed.
- ◆ In 123 B.C., Tiberius's younger brother, Gaius Gracchus, decided to pick up where his brother had left off. He ran for and was elected tribune, and promptly put forward the same proposals that Tiberius had. Gaius was aware that there were many other unhappy groups in Roman society, and so he appended a whole slate of additional laws.

- ◆ Among Gaius's proposed reforms were laws providing that soldiers' clothing be provided at state expense rather than the cost being deducted from their salaries; that new roads be built, which helped farmers get their crops to market more cheaply; that colonies be founded, including one near the site where Carthage had been destroyed; and that juries include representation from the poorer classes.
- ◆ Particularly notable was a plan for the state to provide subsidized grain to poor citizens who lived in the city of Rome. One might view this as an early example of a welfare program. Another significant proposal was that the Latin allies in Italy finally be granted full Roman citizenship. And the centerpiece, of course, was a proposal to distribute public land to poor citizens.



- ◆ His proposals reveal that Gaius had in mind a much more sweeping reform of Roman society than Tiberius had contemplated. Gaius's proposals targeted a range of unhappy groups, and sought to shift the balance of power even more in favor of the people. They also made him extremely popular with the groups that they benefitted, and he was reelected tribune.
- ◆ The Senate was quite upset by these proposals, but because of the odium that had accrued to them for the murder of Tiberius, they were initially reluctant to move so openly against Gaius. Instead, they sought to beat Gaius at his own game by backing another tribune, Livius Drusus, who undermined Gaius by blocking his proposals and pandering even more egregiously to some of the disgruntled groups.

- ◆ The opposition to Gaius Gracchus continued to grow, culminating in the passage of a special decree known as the *senatus consultum ultimum*. This in essence was a declaration of martial law that empowered the magistrates either to use, or to condone the use of, any force they deemed appropriate, if they felt the Roman state was imperiled.
- ◆ With the *senatus consultum ultimum* supplying legal justification, one of Rome's consuls stirred up a violent attack on Gaius and his supporters. While not wanting to dirty their hands directly, the Senate had, for all practical purposes, put a bounty on Gaius Gracchus. Gaius at first tried to flee, but later committed suicide to avoid capture.

THE AFTERMATH

- ◆ Many of the tragedies of the next 100 years might have been avoided if the Gracchi's proposals had been accepted, but the ruling class was resistant to change and would not concede. Even more than fearing change, however, they were jealous of any one of their own number who found a novel way to increase his popularity and move ahead of his peers. This may be the real reason why they were so opposed to the reforms of the Gracchi brothers.
- ◆ One of the great mysteries concerning the Gracchi is what their motivations were. Were they unselfish and idealistic reformers trying to do what they thought was best for the health of their country, or were they self-interested, ambitious aristocrats who had come up with a clever new way to gain power? Ancient sources are split on this issue, with some praising the altruism of the brothers while others accuse them of harboring kingly ambitions.
- ◆ Whatever the reason for the Gracchi's attempts at reforms, there were several serious consequences resulting from these events. First of all, the experiments with reform were squelched, ensuring that all the various resentments that had been simmering would continue to fester and grow worse. Unable to have their grievances resolved through constitutional means, discontented elements would soon resort to even more extreme forms of violence than had been associated with the Gracchi.



- ◆ A second major legacy of the Gracchi was the undermining of many of the institutions of the republic. For example, the potential for exploiting the office of tribune to bypass the Senate and allow legislation to be directly enacted by the people was now plain for all to see, as was the possibility of employing rival tribunes to check one another's actions.
- ◆ For the remainder of the republic, there would be constant strife between tribunes and the Senate, as well as among the tribunes themselves. In addition, a destructive paradigm had been established for violence as an acceptable part of politics, a trend that would continue to grow worse.
- ◆ Finally, the rise and fall of the Gracchi increased the already present factionalism among the ranks of Roman aristocrats. The most significant form that this would take during the rest of the late republic was a struggle between two groups often referred to as the Optimates and the Populares. The Optimates were stereotypically viewed as representing the traditional aristocratic elites, whereas the Populares championed the cause of the common people.

- ◆ These two factions are sometimes referred to as political parties. This is a misleading designation, however, because they were not formal affiliations, nor were they actual organizations in any sense. They were more akin to loose and constantly shifting informal alliances.
- ◆ The Optimates, whose self-chosen name literally means “the best people,” tried to portray themselves as noble defenders of the old traditions that had made Rome great. The Populares, on the other hand, positioned themselves as selfless servants of the will of the people. In reality, both groups were entirely self-serving.

Suggested Reading

Crook et al., *The Cambridge Ancient History*.
Stockton, *The Gracchi*.

Questions to Consider

- ✦ Do you think that the motivations of the Gracchi were primarily altruistic or self-serving?
- ✦ If all of Gaius Gracchus’s proposals had passed, do you think it would have solved some of the problems facing the republic and given it a longer lease on life?



GAIUS MARIUS THE *NOVUS HOMO*

LECTURE 17

The final 80 years of the Roman Republic was characterized by a series of pairs of Roman aristocrats fighting with and murdering one another to see which one would emerge as the dominant figure in Rome. Their motivation was usually nothing more than personal ambition, but their private feuds ended up engulfing the republic in a series of increasingly destructive and large-scale civil wars. The first in this sequence of ambitious warlords was a man named Gaius Marius.

RISE TO POWER

- ◆ Gaius Marius was somewhat unusual in that he did not spring from one of the established elite families such as the Aemelii, Metelli, or Claudii, but was instead a comparative outsider. He was from an equestrian Italian family from the town of Arpinum, and no member of his family had ever held a significant office in the Roman government.
- ◆ Marius would hold the highest office, the consulship, no fewer than seven times—a record in Roman history up to that point. Such a man, one from a previously undistinguished family who held high office in Roman government, was unusual, and was known as a *novus homo*, or “new man.”
- ◆ Rome was a society that gave advantages to insiders and the established order. To gain admission to this exclusive club, an outsider like Marius needed help. One way to do this was to attach yourself to or ingratiate yourself with one of the grand families. Marius climbed the first step on the ladder to success by becoming a client of one of the oldest, most prestigious families at Rome, the Metelli.
- ◆ He also managed to marry far above his station, securing as his wife Julia III, a member of the old patrician Julian family. Under the patronage of the Metelli, Marius was elected tribune in 119 B.C. and praetor in 115 B.C. He served as governor of one of the Spanish provinces, and there gained useful military experience fighting against the unruly hill tribes, who practiced hit-and-run warfare.

- ◆ It was at this time that war against the Numidian king, Jugurtha, broke out. In 109 B.C., Quintus Caecilius Metellus, Marius's mentor, was sent to North Africa to defeat Jugurtha. As might be expected, Metellus took along his promising protégé, Marius, as a junior officer in this campaign. Metellus was moderately successful—enough that his consulship was extended in 108 B.C. so that he could continue pursuing Jugurtha.
- ◆ Thus far, Marius's career had certainly been successful—especially for a *novus homo*—but was still within the usual route that an ambitious upper-class Roman might follow, and there was nothing particularly radical about Marius's actions. That changed dramatically the next year. Marius announced that he wanted to return to Rome to run for election to the consulship for 107 B.C.
- ◆ Naturally, one of Marius's first steps was to go to his patron, Metellus, to seek his blessing and support, and to request leave from his military post in order to return to Rome and begin his campaign for the consulship. Metellus, however, apparently thought that this was too much, too soon for a *novus homo*. Accordingly, Metellus stated that Marius should wait quite a few years, until Metellus's own son was old enough to run for the consulship, and then the two men could campaign for election jointly.
- ◆ Normally, this would be the end of the matter. Marius might be disappointed, but that was how the game of politics worked; he would just have to be patient and wait his turn. But Marius was not patient. He took the shocking step of going against the wishes of his patron by departing for Rome anyway, campaigning on his own, and being elected consul for 107 B.C.
- ◆ Marius next wanted a military command. Adding injury to insult, he spread rumors that the Jugurthine War was not being run well, and that Metellus was a poor commander. In a series of speeches and letters, Marius appealed to the common people and represented himself as a dynamic leader who was one of them, in contrast to the effete and ineffectual noblemen from the old patrician families.



- ◆ Such accusations found favor with the masses, resulting in legislation being passed by the tribal assembly which took the North African command away from Metellus and gave it to Marius. The popular assembly was now directly meddling in foreign affairs. Marius's actions were also a terrible insult to the entire patron-client system, and to the patrician families of Rome in general.
- ◆ Now Marius had his command, but because it had come through the people rather than the Senate, he technically did not have troops, and the aristocratic Senate was not going to provide them to someone who had so offended one of their number. His solution was to open up enlistment to any citizen who cared to volunteer, regardless of wealth.
- ◆ Marius also reorganized his legions, gave them more professional training, and emphasized drill and formations. This made his troops more flexible in battle. Marius's new methods of recruitment, as well as his new methods of training, resulted in the army's transformation from a citizen militia into a standing semiprofessional army.
- ◆ An ominous change was that, because soldiers such as Marius's volunteers could not rely on the state to grant them land or money at the end of their service, they were dependent on the patronage of their commanders to come up with such rewards. Effectively, this meant that these armies were not public armies of the Roman Republic, but instead were more akin to being the private armies of their respective commanders.
- ◆ This shift in loyalties created all sorts of potentially dangerous consequences, including that soldiers would only listen to the orders of their general and patron rather than those of the state and Senate, and that even after discharge from the ranks, veterans would retain their loyalty to commanders in a patron-client type relationship.

ENTER SULLA

- ◆ Marius took over the war in North Africa and, after spending some time training his newly enlisted troops, began to get the upper hand over Jugurtha. Marius was a good general, and quite popular with his men. He cultivated this reputation by sharing their hardships, and not allowing himself the luxuries that his rank would normally allow.
- ◆ Jugurtha was still a formidable opponent, and the war against him was not an easy one. He finally met his downfall, however, not by being openly defeated by the Romans, but rather by treachery.
- ◆ One of Jugurtha's main supporters in his struggle against Rome had been Bocchus, his father-in-law, who was also the monarch of the neighboring kingdom of Mauretania. Bocchus was the sort of ruler who always tried to hedge his bets, however, and even while notionally assisting Jugurtha, he also maintained diplomatic relations with Rome.
- ◆ One of Marius's junior officers who dealt with Bocchus was a young, ambitious member of an old patrician family which had recently fallen on hard times. This man, Lucius Cornelius Sulla, had been selected by Marius to serve as his quaestor during the North African campaign. He was thus a protégé of Marius in much the same way that Marius had started out as a protégé of Metellus.
- ◆ In the course of his interactions with Bocchus, Sulla had seized the opportunity to ingratiate himself to such a degree that Bocchus regarded him as a friend. A bit later, when Jugurtha sought refuge at Bocchus's court, Bocchus summoned his Roman friend, Sulla, and offered to betray Jugurtha by handing him over to the Roman. Sulla informed Marius of the offer, and received the go-ahead to capture Jugurtha.
- ◆ The unfortunate Jugurtha was transported back to Rome where he was displayed in chains as part of the triumph held in 104 B.C., which Marius now got to celebrate for his North African victory. Jugurtha met an ignominious end, being strangled to death in prison.

- ◆ With his victory over Jugurtha, Marius's popularity—at least among some elements of Roman society—soared. One minor note of discord slightly marred his moment of triumph, however. Instead of Marius garnering all the glory for the victory himself, his assistant, Sulla, was receiving some of the accolades for having engineered the capture of Jugurtha. Still, things were definitely looking good for Marius, and on a wave of popular acclaim, he was elected to a second consulship.



GERMANIC TRIBES

- ◆ The war against Jugurtha had proven beneficial to Marius's career, but a new—and much more serious—foreign threat would soon propel it to unheard-of heights. Since the Gallic invasion in 390 B.C., Rome's northern border along the Alps had been relatively stable. Now, however, several migrating Germanic tribes that had been driven from their homelands by a combination of population growth and environmental change began to encroach into Transalpine Gaul.
- ◆ The two largest and most threatening of these tribes were the Teutones and the Cimbri. In 113 B.C., they inflicted a defeat on a Roman consul and his army, but did not immediately press their advantage. After meandering around for a couple years, in 109 B.C. they entered the Rhône Valley and requested permission to settle in Roman territory in return for serving as Roman mercenaries. This offer was rejected by the Senate, whereupon the Germans thrashed another consul and army that had been dispatched to thwart their advance.
- ◆ In 107 B.C., they ambushed and defeated yet a third consular army, this time adding the ritual humiliation of forcing the prisoners to walk under the yoke. They followed this up in 105 B.C. with a deeper incursion into Roman territory, although again the Germans made diplomatic overtures to the Romans for a peaceful settlement. The proconsul who was facing the Germans already had a substantial army, but because the Romans were now taking the northern threat more seriously, the Senate sent out one of the consuls with an additional army as reinforcements.
- ◆ The largest battle yet between Romans and Germans was fought at Arausio in 105 B.C. Unfortunately for the Romans, their two commanders fell to squabbling with one another, with the result that they failed to coordinate their attacks. The Germans were thus able to defeat them sequentially in what proved to be the most costly Roman defeat since Hannibal's victory over them at the battle of Cannae a century earlier.

- ◆ The crushing defeat at Arausio threw the Romans into a panic about the northern menace and, in this crisis, the Roman people looked to their most renowned general, Marius, to save them. Marius had just completed his defeat of Jugurtha, and was now elected consul for a second time by popular demand.
- ◆ Marius energetically threw himself into preparing his army, replicating the methods of recruitment and training that he had used successfully earlier. Marius was very fortunate to have time to institute this training while the Teutones diverted to raiding Gaul for a couple of years and the Cimbri became entangled in an abortive invasion of Spain.
- ◆ All of this preparation occupied several years, during which time Marius was reelected to the consulship a stunning five years in a row. This was a shocking departure from precedent, made possible by a combination of his enormous popularity and the urgency of the threat of the Germans. This did, however, cause resentment and jealousy among the Roman elites.
- ◆ In 102 B.C., the Germans launched a multipronged attack on Italy. The Teutones swarmed down from Gaul through the Rhône valley and approached Italy along the coast from the west, while the Cimbri advanced directly south over the passes through the Alps. Leaving a colleague to try to hold off the Cimbri, Marius moved against the Teutones in Gaul. He did not rush into combat prematurely, but shadowed his opponents, assessing their strength and allowing them to deplete their supplies.
- ◆ Despite taunts from the Teutones, Marius refused to come out and face them in open battle. The frustrated Germans tried an assault against Marius's fortified camp, but this was easily repulsed by the disciplined Romans. Finally, they simply bypassed Marius and headed for the passes that would take them into Italy proper. Marius then left his camp and marched in their wake, harassing them, but still avoiding a pitched battle.

- ◆ Near the town of Aquae Sextiae, Marius judged that the moment had arrived. The night before the battle, he sent a force of 3,000 men to circle around behind the enemy and hide there. In the morning, he drew up the rest of his army on some high ground, and he himself allegedly took a position in the front ranks, like an ordinary legionary. If true—and it may well be—this is an unusual case of a Roman commander directly participating in combat.
- ◆ The Teutones charged ferociously up the slope at the Romans and were met first with a hail of javelins, and then with a solid wall of Roman shields and swords. The battle continued with fierce hand-to-hand combat, until the 3,000 Romans planted during the night by Marius emerged from their hiding place and crashed into the German rear. This proved to be the turning point, and tens of thousands of Teutones were slaughtered by the exultant Romans.



- ◆ There was still the threat of the Cimbri, however, and Marius now rushed to his colleague's assistance. The combined Roman armies fought the decisive engagement in 101 B.C. at the Battle of Vercellae. With Marius taking the lead in command, the battle proved nearly as great a victory as Aquae Sextiae, and the Cimbri were completely routed.
- ◆ Marius returned to Rome to great adulation and celebrated a massive triumph. Even though the menace of the Germans was now eliminated, a grateful populace elected Marius to a sixth consulship.
- ◆ Now, Marius needed to reward his troops, and to do that he needed land to give them. This prompted him to form an alliance with one of the tribunes, an ambitious and volatile young politician named Saturninus. This was an act that, within two years, would bring Marius crashing down from his pinnacle of popularity.
- ◆ Saturninus was a fiery orator, and was not above employing violence and intimidation to achieve his ends. He was eager to use the power of the tribune and the people's voting assemblies to enact radical legislation, putting forward a stream of proposals, including monthly grain distributions to poor citizens in Rome, granting land to veterans, and establishing colonies of veterans.
- ◆ Saturninus pushed things further by introducing some proposals that were guaranteed to personally offend and alienate the Senate, such as requiring them to publicly take oaths to support his legislation. He also introduced a piece of legislation that became known as the *maiestas* law, which made it illegal to "injure or diminish the honor or dignity of the Roman people." Because of its vagueness, this law could be exploited to attack and destroy political opponents.
- ◆ Naturally, the Senate and the Optimates were opposed to this program. Many poorer Roman citizens also turned against it, because the beneficiaries of many of these proposals were Italian half-citizens and allies, and full Roman citizens resented what they perceived as a dilution of their privileges. This led them to reject Saturninus's proposals, and rioting broke out in Rome.

- ◆ Because of his need to reward his troops, Marius supported Saturninus too long, and the backlash against the tribune carried over to Marius, tarnishing his reputation and causing him to lose his popularity with the people. The Senate was already jealous of Marius and looking for a chance to knock him down a notch or two, so were eager to blame him as well.
- ◆ Under direct orders from the Senate to quell the rioting in his role as consul, Marius grudgingly obeyed. This marked the first time that a Roman used troops against other Romans, even though it was at the behest of the Senate. Marius also withdrew his protection from Saturninus, who was subsequently stoned to death by the mob.
- ◆ Embarrassed and with his reputation badly damaged, Marius abruptly announced in 98 B.C. that he needed to fulfill a religious vow, and therefore had to leave Rome immediately and go to the eastern Mediterranean. In reality, it was a self-imposed exile. Marius would ultimately come back to Rome, however, and his career would have a surprising resurgence and second act.

Suggested Reading

Evans, *Gaius Marius*.

Sampson, *The Collapse of Rome*.

Questions to Consider

- ✦ Should Marius be admired as a clever, successful, self-made hero, or as an arrogant self-promotor who harmed his country?
- ✦ Given the crisis of the German invasions, was it justified to break with tradition and elect Marius to the consulship five years in a row?



SULLA THE DICTATOR AND THE SOCIAL WAR

LECTURE 18

At what point is it no longer possible to reverse the downward trajectory of a civilization or state? When does the accumulation of problems achieve an irresistible momentum, and collapse become inevitable? These are questions that haunt the next two decades of Roman history, with the state riven by a vicious civil war between the Romans and their oldest allies, and the longstanding rivalries among Roman politicians set to explode.

PROPOSED REFORMS

- ◆ During most of the 90s B.C., with Marius temporarily removed from the scene in a self-imposed exile in the east, the Senate and the Optimates controlled affairs. They had thwarted earlier reform attempts, such as those of the Gracchi brothers, and they now adopted a hard line against change. As a result, the resentments of veterans, the poor, the equestrians, the lower classes, and the Italians continued to fester.
- ◆ In 91 B.C., yet another tribune, Marcus Livius Drusus, came forward with a slate of proposals for laws that would address some of the still unresolved problems. Interestingly, Drusus was not a representative of the Populares, but instead of the Optimates. He seems to have adopted a moderate stance, believing that some change was necessary to avoid chaos. He thought it would be smarter for the Optimates to offer some compromises, rather than risk losing their grip on power entirely.
- ◆ His three main proposals were: to give land to veterans and the poor through the establishment of new colonies; to admit 300 equestrians to the Senate, doubling its size, and drawing juries from this larger pool; and finally, to extend citizenship to all Italians south of the Po River. This was one of those compromises that gave more than some groups had wanted to concede, but offered less than others had hoped for—thus, it fully pleased no one. Still, it seemed as if the first two proposals would be passed by both Senate and people.

- ◆ Just as with the Gracchi, there is uncertainty about the degree to which Drusus's actions were motivated by altruistic concern for his country and how much he was driven by seeking to enhance his reputation and attract supporters. What might have happened had Drusus's legislation passed is unknown, however, because before the vote could take place, Drusus died under mysterious circumstances, most likely stabbed by an assassin.

THE SOCIAL WAR

- ◆ The death of Drusus and his legislation was the last straw for the long-suffering Italian allies. Once again they had had the prize of citizenship dangled before them, only to have it denied. Fed up with the Romans' intransigence, many of the Italians now broke into open rebellion against Rome. The resulting conflict became known as the Social War, from the Latin word *socii* ("allies").
- ◆ The confederacy of Italian allies modeled itself after the Roman state. They set up a Senate-like assembly composed of 500 members, and established a capital city, which they named Italia.
- ◆ The Social War was particularly bitter because it was, in essence, a civil war. Both sides were using the same tactics and equipment, and it pitted against one another men who for centuries had fought together. Rome had the advantage in having more total troops, as well as an experienced body of officers to call upon. Among these was Lucius Cornelius Sulla, who enhanced his reputation by ably leading armies against the rebels in central Italy.
- ◆ In 90 B.C., in an effort to quell the revolt and prevent it from spreading, the Romans proclaimed that full citizenship would be granted to all Latins and Italians who had remained loyal, and further stated that any rebels who immediately ceased hostilities and renewed allegiance to Rome would also be awarded full citizenship. This had some effect, and although the war continued, similar laws were passed in each of the two subsequent years, eroding support for the rebellion.

- ◆ The Italians achieved some early successes but, as the weight of Rome's resources came to bear upon them, the tide turned in Rome's favor. Nevertheless, the war dragged on until 88 B.C., when Roman armies finally crushed the most intransigent of the insurgents.
- ◆ The war brought considerable death and devastation to central Italy, produced hordes of refugees and burdensome debts, and set a very harmful precedent for civil war being used to solve political disagreements—all of which should have been easily avoidable if the Romans had only done the obvious and justified thing by extending citizenship to the Italians much earlier.
- ◆ On the positive side, the ranks of Rome's citizens were now increased by at least half a million, and all of Italy became fully Romanized and integrated into Roman culture. As the war was winding down, Sulla, who was clearly on the ascendant, was elected consul for the year 88 B.C.

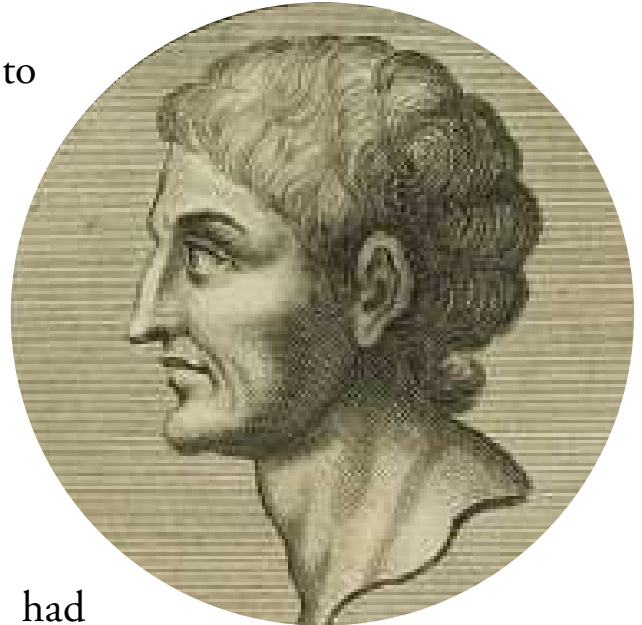


SULLA'S RISE

- ◆ Sulla soon aspired to enhance his military laurels. Conveniently for Sulla, just as the Social War was winding down, a new external foe had emerged in King Mithridates VI of Pontus, a realm located near the Black Sea. Mithridates actually had talent and ambition, and he would prove to be a thorn in Rome's side for several generations.
- ◆ After a series of inciting incidents, the armies of Mithridates and his generals swept into Greece and parts of Macedonia, and the entire eastern holdings of Rome seemed to be crumbling. The situation was grave, and the Senate authorized a powerful army to go east and confront Mithridates. But there was some dispute as to who would receive command of Rome's army.
- ◆ Marius, now elderly, felt that the command should be his due to his previous successes against the Germans. The Senate, however, favored Sulla, and announced that the command against Mithridates would go to him. By now, though, there had been too many examples illustrating how the will of the Senate could be circumvented.
- ◆ Sure enough, a tribune backed by Marius came forward with a raft of new proposals, among them one that would strip the command from Sulla and award it to Marius. The now-predictable riots ensued, but the bill passed, and Sulla was forced to flee the city. Rather than going meekly into exile, however, Sulla took the six legions he had raised to fight Mithridates and marched on Rome.
- ◆ Sulla's move was so unexpected that there was no organized opposition. His men captured the city, brutally cutting down any who opposed them, and setting fire to their houses. Sulla declared the equivalent of martial law, and had Marius and 11 of his most prominent supporters condemned as traitors to the state. He also, of course, had the command against Mithridates switched once again from Marius to himself.

- ◆ Now it was Marius who was on the run, escaping and finding refuge in North Africa. Having allied himself firmly with the Optimate faction, Sulla pushed through several bills whose intent was to solidify their control and curb the power of the tribunes and popular assemblies. This was the first time that a Roman had marched on Rome, using a Roman army against his own country, and it set a horrible precedent.
- ◆ With his dominance reestablished and the Senate seemingly in control in Rome, Sulla took his army and left for the east to campaign against Mithridates. Back in Rome, meanwhile, opposition to Sulla coalesced around a politician named Cinna, who allied himself with Marius. By appealing to Marius's veterans, slaves, and disgruntled Italians, the two men raised an army, and, at its head, Marius marched on Rome.
- ◆ After a brief siege, Marius captured the city, killed one of the consuls, and embarked on a bloody purge of his enemies, who were unconstitutionally executed without a trial. Their property was confiscated and their severed heads were put on display on the rostra in the forum. Marius now contrived to have himself appointed for the year 86 B.C. to a record seventh consulship, and, predictably, had the Mithridates command transferred from Sulla to himself.
- ◆ Marius did not enjoy his triumph for long, however. Only a few days after taking office, the 70-year-old Marius became ill. He fell into a delirium in which he feverishly imagined that he was leading the army against Mithridates. Dreaming of the command that had been denied him, Marius died only 17 days into his seventh consulship.
- ◆ Rome was still controlled by Marius's followers, who began to raise forces with which to oppose Sulla. In the east, Sulla half-heartedly pursued the war against Mithridates. In 85 B.C., he hastily made a treaty with Mithridates, and in 83 B.C., Sulla set sail for Italy, bringing five legions of his troops along with him.

- ◆ For a second time, Sulla marched at the head of a Roman army against his own capital city. In a battle just outside the city gates, Sulla defeated his enemies. Some of these, such as the son of Marius, committed suicide, while others fled to remote provinces. By 81 B.C., the various opponents were vanquished and Sulla was once more on top.
- ◆ This time, Sulla was determined to settle affairs to his liking with such finality that no opposition would be left to thwart him. He had the Senate officially endorse all of his previous actions and, most consequentially, appoint him dictator, which gave him unlimited power to do anything he wanted.
- ◆ In the past, the office of dictator had been accompanied by a strict term limit of no more than six months. Sulla, however, had himself made dictator without any time limit. He claimed that his only goal was to restore the republic, and to return Rome to its old-fashioned virtue. To achieve these ends, he settled on a two-part strategy.
- ◆ The simpler and more direct component of Sulla's plan was to eliminate anyone who might be a threat or who might disagree with him. This was accomplished via a mechanism known as proscription, which involving publishing lists declaring certain individuals outlaws. These individuals had their citizenship revoked and a reward placed on their heads. Anyone could lawfully kill such proscribed persons and claim the reward.
- ◆ The property of the proscribed was seized and auctioned by the state. Sulla filled the proscription lists with the supporters of Marius, political opponents, wealthy people whose property he wished to seize, and many others. Thousands were said to have been killed, including 15 ex-consuls, 90 senators, and 2,600 equestrians.



- ◆ The second stage of Sulla's plan was to implement a series of reforms that would allegedly restore the republic to its traditional state, one in which the Senate and nobles had complete control. To do this, he increased the power of the upper classes and Senate by reorganizing the voting assemblies to give them more weight, granting the Senate greater control over proposing and approving legislation, enlarging the number of senators to 600, preventing anyone from holding offices consecutively, and limiting the power of the tribunician veto.
- ◆ Having reorganized the republic to his satisfaction, Sulla resigned from the dictatorship, withdrew to his country estate in Campania, began to write his memoirs, and indulged in his favorite pastimes of hunting and drinking. He plainly envisioned for himself a long, comfortable retirement, but it was not to be. Much like Marius, a short time after reaching the peak of power, Sulla fell ill. He died after only a year of retirement.

Suggested Reading

Dart, *The Social War*.
Keaveney, *Sulla*.

Questions to Consider

- † Whose actions were more innovative, Marius's or Sulla's?
- † Whose actions were more detrimental to the Roman Republic, Marius's or Sulla's?



THE ERA OF POMPEY THE GREAT

LECTURE 19

Among the millions of boys in the ancient world who dreamed of emulating Alexander the Great, there was one who would grow up to see his ambitions realized: Gnaeus Pompeius, better known as Pompey the Great. Pompey was precocious, achieving astonishing successes while just in his twenties. Like Alexander, he led an army rampaging through the east, conquering a vast swath of territory and amassing unprecedented renown and riches. While his career would win him everlasting glory, it would also hasten the destruction and collapse of the Roman Republic.

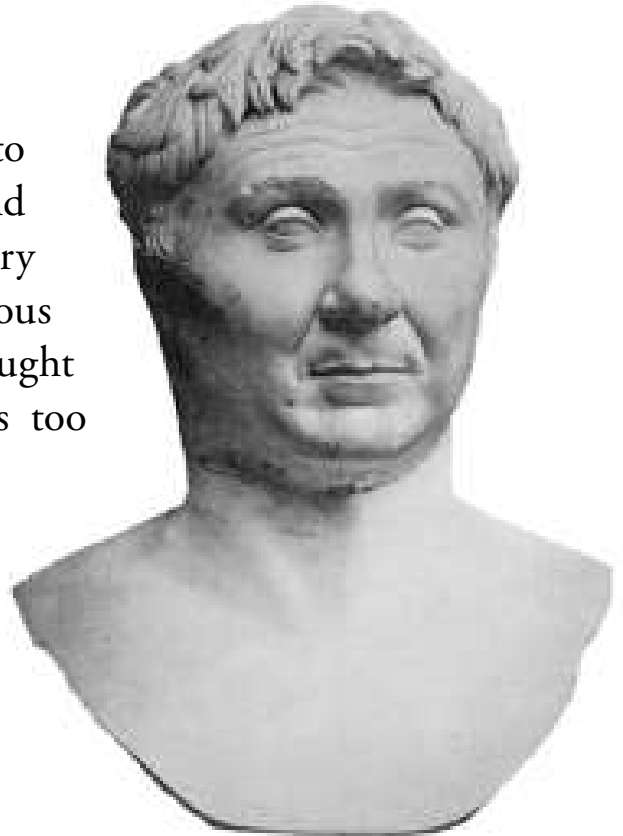
EARLY LIFE

- ◆ Pompey's father, Pompeius Strabo, was a well-regarded general and influential politician who, as consul in 89 B.C., managed to climb to the highest levels of the Roman government. He owned large estates in the northern Picenum region of Italy, an area that would be a fertile source of clients and soldiers for both Strabo and his son.
- ◆ While Strabo certainly had a successful career, he seems to have had an off-putting personality that hindered his popularity. Strabo's son, Pompey, apparently inherited his father's military competence and also significantly improving upon his disposition. The younger Pompey had an appealing personality that enabled him to win friends and attract followers.
- ◆ Pompey's charisma was demonstrated early on when a near-mutiny among Strabo's troops was calmed by the 18-year-old Pompey, who stepped up to bring them back in line, at one point even flinging himself down across the gate of the camp to prevent the troops from running off.
- ◆ Pompey's most dominant personality trait, however, was ambition. This was coupled with a burning impatience that made him loathe the idea of slowly working his way up the ladder of government posts and offices in the manner that good Roman aristocrats were supposed to.

- ◆ Politics at Rome over the last few decades had been dominated by the struggles between Sulla and Marius and their respective followers. In 83 B.C., when Pompey was still only 23 years old, Sulla returned from the east with his army and made his infamous march against Rome.
- ◆ Although Marius himself had recently died, his faction still officially controlled the government, and thus a Roman civil war was imminent. In this crisis, Pompey decided to throw his support behind Sulla.

SUPPORT OF SULLA

- ◆ Technically, Pompey was too young to hold any elected office or to command troops in any capacity other than as a very junior officer. However, the ambitious Pompey just could not stand the thought that here was a war, but that he was too young to play an important role.
- ◆ With the model of Alexander and his youthful feats in his mind, Pompey was determined to get involved. If he couldn't do it officially, he would find another route.
- ◆ Pompey's solution was to raise his own private army drawn from his father's veterans and his clients in Picenum, and to equip it using his family's wealth. Pompey had absolutely no legal authority or authorization to do this, but he would not let a little detail like that impair his chances of gaining glory.
- ◆ By these means, Pompey assembled his own army of no fewer than three legions. As the army's self-appointed general, Pompey marched off to join the civil war on Sulla's side. He may have been arrogant, but he had skill to back it up, winning several battles on his way to join up with Sulla.



- ◆ In the civil wars that followed, Pompey was a strong supporter of Sulla, commanding armies victoriously in Italy, Sicily, and North Africa. He hunted down Sulla's enemies so enthusiastically that he earned the nickname *carnifex adulescens*, meaning "the young butcher."
- ◆ When he returned to Italy, he asked Sulla if he could celebrate a triumph. Sulla was initially reluctant to grant such an exalted honor to a man so young, but he eventually gave in and allowed Pompey to have his triumph.
- ◆ Pompey continued pursuing and defeating Sulla's enemies. One of the most notable of these was a man named Quintus Sertorius, who was based in Spain and had already defeated several Roman armies sent there against him. In 77 B.C., Pompey was dispatched to Spain to deal with this dangerous opponent.
- ◆ Although Sulla died in 78 B.C., his followers, including Pompey, continued pressing the war against Sertorius. At first, things did not go well for Pompey. Sertorius repeatedly outmaneuvered him, and even defeated Pompey and his lieutenants in several battles. In one of these, Pompey was wounded and only narrowly escaped being captured by Sertorius's troops.
- ◆ The war continued for several years, but with the assistance of reinforcements from Italy, Pompey and the other generals gradually began to get the upper hand. Although at the peak of his power, Sertorius had controlled nearly the entire Iberian Peninsula, he now found himself hemmed in from several sides and pushed into an ever smaller territory.
- ◆ Sertorius's allies began to melt away. In 73 B.C., he was murdered by one of his own officers who had turned traitor. No doubt the assassin expected to receive a rich reward from Pompey for this betrayal, but was severely disappointed when Pompey instead had him executed.

SPARTACUS

- ◆ With Spain pacified, Pompey returned to Italy, where another ongoing conflict offered a further chance to win military glory—the slave revolt of Spartacus. Spartacus was a Thracian by birth who had been captured and enslaved by Rome.
- ◆ Condemned to fight as a gladiator, Spartacus was sent to a gladiator school at Capua, on the Bay of Naples. Spartacus led a revolt of the gladiators at his school, and he and 73 others slew their overseers and escaped.



- ◆ Spartacus and his followers based themselves on Mt. Vesuvius, and launched forays against the nearby plantations of wealthy Romans. They would attack the plantations and then free the slaves laboring on them, most of whom joined Spartacus's band.
- ◆ With his numbers swollen to more than 50,000 through raids, runaways, and sympathizers, Spartacus created a sizable army. He made extremely effective use of it, too, defeating several successive overconfident Roman military forces that were sent against him.
- ◆ What had begun as a seemingly minor rebellion had developed into a major crisis. At the time, Pompey was still in Spain mopping up Sertorius's forces, so the Roman Senate turned to another of its leading generals, Marcus Licinius Crassus, and tasked him with the job of suppressing Spartacus's revolt. Crassus was an ambitious aristocrat who was famous for being fabulously wealthy.



- ◆ Crassus came from an old aristocratic family and had been a member of Sulla's faction, and he is arguably as close an approximation to an entrepreneurial business tycoon as one can find in Roman history. By the time of his death, he had amassed wealth amounting to nearly 170 million sesterces—the largest private fortune we know of in ancient Rome.
- ◆ Crassus was given an army of four legions to suppress Spartacus, and he used his personal wealth to raise even more. He was proceeding with caution when word arrived that Pompey had returned to Italy with his troops and was also marching against Spartacus. Not wanting to share the credit, Crassus stepped up his campaign, cornering Spartacus and decisively defeating him. To discourage future slave rebellions, Spartacus and 6,000 of his followers were crucified along the length of the Appian Way between Capua and Rome.
- ◆ It seemed as if Crassus's victory should gain him great prestige, but at the last moment, Pompey found a way to insert himself into the campaign and steal much of Crassus's glory. A small group of 5,000 slaves had broken away from the main group before the battle. Pompey managed to intercept and destroy them, enabling him to claim that he had been the one to strike the final blow that ended the slave rebellion.

CONSULSHIP AND CONQUEST

- ◆ In 71 B.C., Pompey was still only 35 years old. He had been victorious in Italy, Sicily, North Africa, Spain, and southern Gaul, and now celebrated another triumph for his recent successes in Spain. Despite all these achievements, however, he was not yet a senator, and had never held an actual elected office in the Roman government. He let it be known that he wanted to run for the very highest post, the consulship.
- ◆ Not only had Pompey never held any of the usual offices that led up to it, but he was also too young to be legally eligible for the consulship. On the other hand, he was very popular and still retained control over what amounted to a personal army. The only individual who might have been able to stand up to the intimidation of Pompey's armies was Crassus, who also coveted the consulship.

- ◆ Although he was jealous of his younger rival, Crassus realized that if the two men worked together, they could both get what they wanted. Thus, Pompey and Crassus formed an alliance, and, as a result, both were elected consul for 70 B.C. Pompey had completely circumvented the normal route to the consulship, but by this point he was so powerful that his wishes could not be ignored.
- ◆ The most significant legislation that Pompey presided over as consul was a series of measures restoring the powers that Sulla had stripped from the office of tribune. Pompey did this because he wanted to use tribunes as his pawns and employ their ability to propose laws that could be ratified directly by the voting assemblies of the people, thereby circumventing the Senate. His efforts were successful.
- ◆ Next on Pompey's agenda was another military command. One of the great problems at this time was piracy. Pirates infested much of the Mediterranean, and plundered Roman merchant ships at will. Pompey's campaign against the pirates turned out to be amazingly successful. Unfortunately for him, however, it had been so efficient that his command was over in a short period of time and he was once again left looking for an opportunity to win further glory.
- ◆ The best possibility centered around Rome's old enemy, King Mithridates. The wily Mithridates, ruler of the kingdom of Pontus on the shores of the Black Sea, had been defying Rome for decades, and had managed to survive or even defeat a whole series of eminent Roman generals who had been sent against him. The current general was a man named Lucullus, who, in 68 B.C., had just suffered an embarrassing defeat at the hands of one of Mithridates's allies.
- ◆ In 66 B.C., with a large army allocated to him by new legislation, Pompey swept into Pontus, promptly defeated Mithridates's much weaker force, and captured his kingdom. Mithridates himself escaped and fled to the east, eventually taking refuge on the Crimean Peninsula.

- ◆ Though he continued plotting against Rome, Mithridates was no longer a credible threat. Instead of pursuing him, Pompey turned south and invaded the neighboring kingdom of Armenia. Having subdued Armenia, Pompey then claimed that he was concerned that the neighboring kingdoms might prove hostile, and thus that a preemptive strike was necessary.
- ◆ Pompey continued onward, invading and conquering Albania and Bithynia, then turning south into Syria, what is now Palestine, Nabatea, and Judea. Pompey was having the time of his life, rampaging throughout the eastern Mediterranean, racking up riches and glory. While contemplating heading toward Egypt, however, Pompey got a piece of bad news. Far to the northeast, after doggedly having fought the Romans for 25 years, Mithridates had finally given up and committed suicide. This meant that Pompey's command was now at an end.



- ◆ Pompey's personal wealth and prestige were now truly enormous. He took his time returning to Rome, accepting en route the adulation of Greek states, who lavished honors on him. In Rome, he celebrated yet another triumph, during which he wore a cloak said to have belonged to Alexander the Great. Pompey even took to arranging his hair in a dramatic, swept-back pompadour, in imitation of Alexander's famous hairstyle.
- ◆ Pompey's entire career was a challenge to the republic. He rose to power by working outside the system and irretrievably undermined the institutions of the republic. He set precedents that could not be undone. Nevertheless, in 62 B.C., when he had reached the pinnacle of his power and might have taken over the state, he had enough respect for the republic that he disbanded his army and returned to Rome.

Suggested Reading

Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic*.

Leach, *Pompey the Great*.

Seager, *Pompey*.

Questions to Consider

- ✚ In his rise, Pompey broke many traditions and circumvented all the normal procedures. Do you think these actions were destructive to the institutions of Rome, or did they constitute necessary changes to an outdated system?
- ✚ Do you agree with Lucullus's accusation that Pompey specialized in stealing credit for achievements that others had really done the hard work for, or does Pompey fully deserve the credit for his accomplishments?



THE RISE OF JULIUS CAESAR

LECTURE 20

When Pompey the Great triumphantly returned to Rome late in 62 B.C., it seemed unimaginable that there could ever be anyone who could possibly compete with him. Yet, as fate would have it, there was already present within the republic a man who, within a mere decade, would first match Pompey's fame, and then eclipse it. This was Gaius Julius Caesar. Although Pompey and Caesar would eventually become bitter rivals, they began as allies.

THE FIRST TRIUMVIRATE

- ◆ When Pompey returned to Rome from the east, the dilemma facing him was what to do next. There really was no higher position that he could aspire to unless he took the final step of overthrowing the republic and seizing complete power for himself. With his loyal troops behind him, he almost certainly could have done this, and there were many among Rome's elites who both feared and expected him to do so.
- ◆ Instead, Pompey landed peacefully in Italy, disbanded his armies, and respected the conventions of the republic. Even though he had made his entire career by breaking or subverting the rules of the republic, in the end, Pompey did not put his personal ambition ahead of the state itself.
- ◆ The next year, the most pressing obligation that Pompey faced was to fulfill the expectations of his veterans that, in return for having loyally served him, they would receive grants of land from the state upon their discharge. In addition, Pompey needed the Senate to officially ratify his settlement of affairs in the eastern Mediterranean.
- ◆ Pompey no doubt assumed the Senate would move quickly to do both of these things; but once he had disbanded his armies, he lost the coercive power that they exerted, and the Senate delayed granting him what he wanted. All through 61 and 60 B.C., the Senate continually stalled, dithered, or found other issues to distract it, while Pompey grew more and more impatient with their intransigence.

- ◆ Pompey was not the only prominent Roman who had become frustrated with the Senate at this particular moment. Pompey's old rival, Crassus, was also finding his efforts to pass legislation stymied by the Senate. Even though he resented Pompey's having surpassed him in wealth and fame, Crassus was still one of the richest, most powerful, and eminent statesmen of the day. Finally, there was a third Roman, whose ambitions were being thwarted by the Senate. This was the up-and-coming politician, Gaius Julius Caesar.
- ◆ Born in 100 B.C., Caesar was a younger contemporary of Pompey and Crassus. Caesar came from one of the oldest patrician families, the Julii. Up to this point, he had cultivated a solid, but not exceptional career, which had followed a much more conventional path than Pompey's. He now aspired to jump into the top ranks of Rome's politicians by being elected to the consulship; however, much of the Senate opposed his candidacy.
- ◆ These three men, who should have been natural rivals, found common cause against the Senate, and joined together so that each could get what he wanted. Their informal alliance became known as the First Triumvirate.
- ◆ The First Triumvirate's immediate purpose was to get Caesar elected consul for the year 59 B.C., with the understanding that he would use that position to force through grants of land for Pompey's veterans. Caesar was plainly the junior member of the triumvirate, while Pompey was clearly the senior partner.

THE RISE OF CAESAR

- ◆ In addition to coming from an illustrious old family, Caesar had connections to some of the more powerful recent figures within the republic. Caesar's aunt had married the great general and statesman Marius, and in 84 B.C., Caesar himself had married the daughter of one of Marius's key supporters.

- ◆ During the dictatorship of Sulla, who employed proscriptions to slaughter nearly all the members of Marius's faction, probably the only reason that the teenage Caesar escaped the purge was because he was deemed too young to be worthy of notice. Caesar, however, harbored great ambitions.
- ◆ After Sulla's dictatorship ended, Caesar embarked on what superficially looked like a very standard career for a young Roman politician. He started at the bottom, and he held the right offices in the right sequence. Yet, throughout this seemingly conventional stage of his career, there were hints of his already sizable ego and of the intense ambition that burned within him.
- ◆ Caesar served in the army as a military tribune, a junior level officer, and gained some fame for prosecuting cases in the Roman law courts. In 69 B.C., he held a quaestorship, and was assigned to a province in Spain, where he discharged his responsibilities in a dutiful manner and made useful contacts among the Spanish tribes.
- ◆ In 65 B.C., Caesar was aedile for the city of Rome, a post that primarily focused on mundane tasks such as maintaining the city's roads and sewers. The aediles were also responsible for overseeing public festivals. Caesar saw an opportunity to gain popularity with the common people by providing public entertainments on an unprecedented scale.

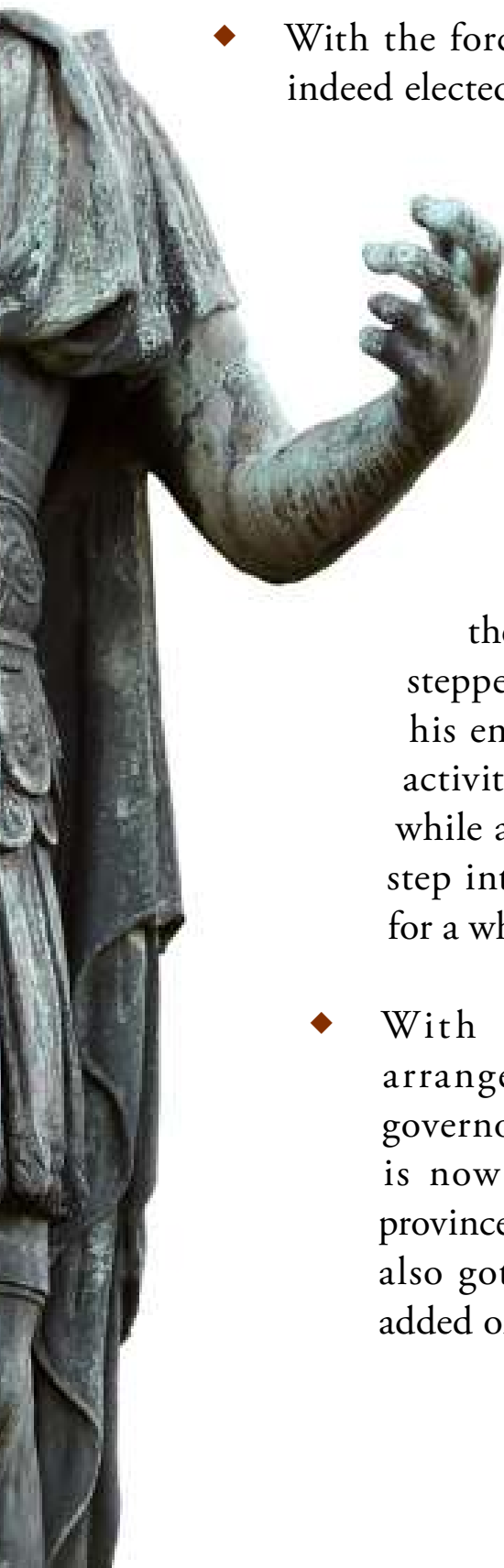


- ◆ Caesar continued to work his way up through the usual offices, including a stint as proconsul, or governor, in Spain, during which he won additional military glory. He returned to Rome in 59 B.C., desiring to ascend the final step on the ladder of offices by being elected consul. His successes had started to elicit jealousy from other aristocrats, and a sizable portion of the Senate balked at throwing their support behind his candidacy. This is why he entered into the First Triumvirate with Pompey and Crassus.

- ◆ With the forceful backing of Pompey and Crassus, Caesar was indeed elected as one of the two consuls for 59 B.C. Caesar ended up completely dominating affairs, and often simply ignored the plaintive protests of his fellow consul, a rival politician named Bibulus. Eventually, Bibulus felt so left out and offended that he retired, effectively leaving Caesar in charge.

- ◆ As consul, Caesar overrode the protests of the Senate and rammed through legislation granting Pompey's veterans land, as well as gaining ratification for Pompey's settlements in the east. Caesar's next dilemma was that the instant he stepped down from the consulship at the end of his term, his enemies would bring lawsuits against him for illegal activities. Because office-holders could not be prosecuted while actually holding office, if Caesar could immediately step into another government post, he would remain safe for a while.

- ◆ With the aid of Pompey and Crassus, Caesar arranged to get a proconsular command: a five-year governorship of the province of Cisalpine Gaul, in what is now northern Italy. This was a relatively peaceful province, and came with a modest allotment of legions. Caesar also got jurisdiction for Transalpine Gaul and Illyricum added on to it.



THE CONQUEST OF GAUL

- ◆ Although Caesar's provinces were peaceful, they bordered Gaul and other regions to the north that were inhabited by dozens of barbarian tribes. These included Celtic, Belgian, and Germanic groups, and Caesar plainly viewed their proximity as a ripe opportunity for him to win military glory.
- ◆ The various tribes were not united, and spent much of their time in conflict with one another. Individually they were fierce and skilled warriors, but they lacked the disciplined organization that was one of the main characteristics of the Roman military system.
- ◆ In the series of wars that Caesar fought against these tribes, he revealed a true talent for warfare, and proved to be an outstanding general with keen strategic and tactical abilities as well as an inspirational leader of men who shared the hardships of his troops.
- ◆ Caesar's conquest of Gaul was fairly blatant imperialism. It has been stated that over the course of nearly a decade campaigning in Gaul, Caesar's actions resulted in the death of at least a million Gauls and the enslavement of another million, and these numbers are probably not much of an exaggeration.



- ◆ Even the Romans thought Caesar's behavior was questionable. The Senate actually proposed a bill stipulating that Caesar should be turned over to the Gauls as a sort of war criminal for his unwarranted attacks. Caesar was careful, however, to always have a tribune or two back at Rome under his control who could veto any legislation that would hurt him.
- ◆ Although physically absent from Rome, Caesar made sure that the people of the city were continually reminded of his feats of military glory. At the end of each campaign season, Caesar himself wrote up an account of his accomplishments, and arranged to have these narratives circulated at Rome. These first-hand dispatches constituted a form of propaganda that enhanced Caesar's reputation. Collected together, these accounts are known as *The Gallic Wars*.

RISING TENSIONS

- ◆ Throughout his conquests, Caesar had maintained his alliance with Pompey and Crassus. The more success Caesar had, however, the greater the tensions among them grew. Pompey had arranged to be given a proconsulship in Spain, but had chosen to remain in Rome governing Spain through legates—an act which was of dubious legality.
- ◆ Meanwhile, if Crassus hoped to keep up with his rivals, he now desperately needed to achieve some great military victory in order to match Pompey's conquest of the east and Caesar's exploits in Gaul. He thus connived to be put in charge of the province of Syria, which bordered the powerful eastern kingdom of Parthia. In 54 B.C., Crassus marched out to invade Parthia with a substantial army of seven legions.
- ◆ Unfortunately, Crassus was not a military commander of genius like Caesar, or even of solid competence like Pompey. In one of the greatest Roman military disasters up to that point, nearly the entire army was killed or captured. Crassus and his son were both slain, and Crassus's head and hands were cut off and put on display at the Parthian court.

- ◆ Pompey was jealous of Caesar, and the Senate was resentful of Caesar's popularity—not to mention deeply concerned about the private army that he had forged. Thus, Pompey, the man who had made a career by circumventing the Senate, found himself rather oddly allying with the Senate against a man who, in many respects, was a younger, even more ambitious version of himself.
- ◆ The Senate demanded that Caesar end his governorship, disband his troops, and return to Rome. Caesar procrastinated. Proposals and counterproposals flew back and forth between Rome and Caesar, but with neither side willing to give in, the Roman Republic now faced the grim prospect of civil war.

Suggested Reading

Caesar, *The Gallic Wars*.

Gelzer, *Caesar*.

Goldsworthy, *Caesar*.

Yavetz, *Julius Caesar and His Public Image*.

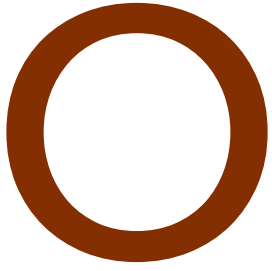
Questions to Consider

- ✦ How would you assess Caesar's campaigns in Gaul? Were they necessary wars to pacify a dangerous region that should be regarded as glorious military achievements, or were they unjustified, unprovoked aggression that resulted in genocide?
- ✦ Compare Caesar's actions to Pompey's. Who did more to undermine the institutions of the Roman Republic?



CIVIL WAR AND THE ASSASSINATION OF CAESAR

LECTURE 21

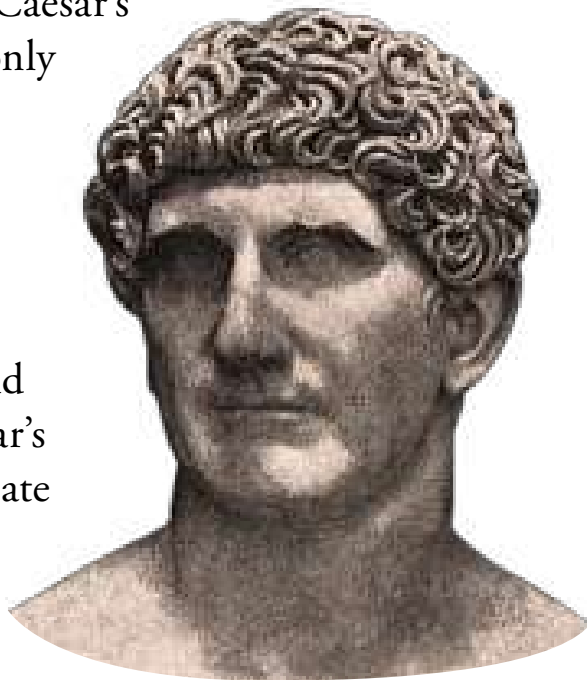


n the morning of January 11, 49 B.C., Julius Caesar stood lost in thought on the banks of the Rubicon, a small river that was the official boundary between the province Caesar governed and Italy proper. The instant that he traversed this boundary at the head of troops, it was an illegal act and amounted to a declaration of war against his own state, the Roman Republic.

MOTIVATIONS

- ◆ Caesar had spent the previous nine years campaigning in Gaul. While he was popular with the Roman people, Caesar had made many enemies in the Senate, and this faction sought to curtail his rise by ending his governorship and, perhaps more importantly, forcing him to disband the large, loyal, and battle-hardened army that he had accumulated over the course of his campaigns.
- ◆ Caesar had been willing to do this, but only if he could stand for election for the consulship for 49 B.C., even though he was not physically present at Rome, as was customary for such candidates. Caesar desired to move seamlessly from one magistracy to the other, and thereby evade his opponents' attempts to bring lawsuits against him—something they could not do so long as he was a currently serving office-holder.
- ◆ When this request was denied, Caesar's agents in Rome claimed that he would disband his troops and return to Rome as a private citizen if Pompey agreed to simultaneously do the same. It is uncertain whether this offer was sincere but, feeling that they finally had a chance to knock Caesar down a peg or two, the senatorial hardliners were not interested in negotiation.
- ◆ They first maneuvered to have two of Caesar's legions stripped from him and transferred to Pompey, and eventually managed to have Caesar declared a public enemy, accompanying this action with the passage of the *senatus consultum ultimum*, a special and controversial decree that empowered the state's representatives to use any means necessary to defend the republic.

- ◆ Caesar always kept a few tribunes in his employ at Rome, and two of these tried to veto this measure, but were ignored and even threatened with bodily harm, resulting in their fleeing Rome to join Caesar. One of these tribunes was a promising protégé of Caesar's named Marcus Antonius, more commonly known today as Mark Antony.
- ◆ Caesar's enemies had now backed him into a corner, so he either had to accede to their demands or else openly revolt against the state. Giving in would probably have meant the end of Caesar's political career. Despite this, the Senate genuinely seem to have believed that he would obey.
- ◆ Even if he did decide to rebel, they assumed that nothing much would happen until spring, because it was midwinter and troops usually did not campaign then. They should thus have had ample time to muster and organize their own sizable military forces as well as those of Pompey, enabling them to crush any attack launched by Caesar.
- ◆ One of the distinguishing characteristics of Caesar as a general was decisiveness, and he displayed it now, choosing instead to immediately cross the Rubicon and march on Rome. He only had a single legion with him, but this move caught the Senate completely by surprise and totally unprepared. Caesar advanced south into Italy, sweeping aside the minor forces that attempted to stop him.
- ◆ Realizing that they did not have the resources to stop Caesar, Pompey and the anti-Caesar faction of the Senate fled Italy for regions in which they could muster troops. These included Spain, North Africa, and the Greek East, much of which considered Pompey its personal patron and where many of his veterans had settled.



- ◆ The rationale offered by Caesar for his actions was that the Senate's brushing aside of the tribunes' vetoes, and their issuance of the *senatus consultum ultimum*, had been illegal, and thus that he was merely defending the laws of the republic. Caesar's quick march had gained him Italy, but the war was by no means won, and, in fact, the military resources available to Pompey and the Senate were substantially greater than those commanded by Caesar. The republic now faced the prospect of a long and destructive civil war.

WAR

- ◆ Leaving Mark Antony and a man named Lepidus in charge of Italy and Rome, Caesar first targeted his foes in Spain. In a lightning campaign in Spain lasting less than two months, he defeated the Pompeian forces there and returned to Rome, where he was appointed consul for the year 48 B.C.
- ◆ Hoping to win over those who were not adamantly opposed to him, Caesar exhibited restraint, deliberately not emulating Sulla, who, a generation earlier, had similarly marched on Rome and then indulged in a bloody purge of his enemies. He also passed popular legislation aimed at alleviating debt, encouraging business, and permitting those who had been exiled by Pompey to come home.
- ◆ Meanwhile, Pompey had established himself in the east, where he was industriously assembling a very large and steadily growing army, which included many veteran troops. The challenge posed by Caesar seems to have galvanized and rejuvenated Pompey, who now exhibited the energy and drive that had characterized the early stages of his career.
- ◆ Ancient sources claim that Pompey personally oversaw the training of his men, going so far as to participate in the drills himself, and even demonstrating fighting techniques to the recruits. Judging Pompey to be the most serious threat facing him, and one that would only grow more dangerous with time, Caesar decided to force an immediate confrontation with his old rival.

- ◆ Caesar gathered his legions at Brundisium, a port on the heel of the Italian peninsula that was the standard departure point for travel eastward, but getting them to Greece presented a serious problem. He had few transport ships, Pompey's much superior navy controlled the seas, and Caesar was low on supplies for his army. In a typically daring move, Caesar undertook a risky winter-time crossing, dodging Pompey's ships and sailing across the Adriatic with about half his men.



- ◆ Caesar tried to seize one of Pompey's supply dumps at Dyrrhachium, but Pompey intercepted him with a force that probably at least doubled the number of Caesar's army. After some complicated siege warfare and skirmishing, Caesar's now starving army was compelled to retreat and retreat again, falling back southward all the way to Pharsalus in Greece.
- ◆ Pompey's followers felt that they now had Caesar on the run, and urged Pompey to seek a decisive battle in which Caesar and his army could be destroyed once and for all. Pompey agreed, and the stage was set for the final showdown between Caesar and Pompey at the Battle of Pharsalus. Pompey commanded about 45,000 troops, versus perhaps 25,000 for Caesar.
- ◆ In order to equal the length of Pompey's line, Caesar had to deploy his men in a substantially thinner formation; but when the battle began, they held their own, and the outcome remained uncertain. The decisive moment occurred on the flank opposite the river, where Caesar's cavalry succeeded in routing their Pompeian counterparts. With Pompey's cavalry protecting that side of his line cleared away, Caesar was able to direct a contingent of troops that he had previously held back to attack this exposed flank.
- ◆ Under pressure from two sides, the Pompeian line crumbled, and Caesar had at last won a great and decisive victory over his rival. When Pompey saw the battle beginning to turn against him, he tore off the emblems of his rank and fled from the field. While he managed to escape, thousands of his men were killed and tens of thousands captured.
- ◆ Seeking asylum, Pompey escaped to Egypt, which was one of the last remaining major independent kingdoms around the shores of the Mediterranean that was not yet under Roman control. Knowing that Caesar was likely to pursue Pompey to Egypt, and hoping to curry favor with him, the Egyptians promptly murdered Pompey. When Caesar landed in Egypt three days later, he was presented with Pompey's pickled head preserved in a jar of brine. Egypt was the last Hellenistic kingdom surviving from the break-up of Alexander's empire, and it was still ruled by direct descendants of Alexander's general, Ptolemy.



- ◆ Currently, the country was enmeshed in a civil war between two of Ptolemy's descendants, the teenaged king Ptolemy XIII and his sister Cleopatra VII. Although he only had one legion with him and had yet to deal with his senatorial foes, Caesar immediately inserted himself into this local conflict on the side of Cleopatra. It was a rash move, and Caesar found himself in a very dangerous situation, trapped and besieged in the palace at Alexandria by more than 20,000 pro-Ptolemy soldiers.
- ◆ After holding out for several months, Caesar was rescued by the arrival of several more of his legions, and with these reinforcements he was then able to defeat the pro-Ptolemy faction and place Cleopatra on the throne as Queen of Egypt. At some point during all of this, the 53-year-old Caesar embarked upon a famous affair with the 22-year-old Egyptian queen. The union produced a son named Caesarion, whom Cleopatra hoped would be officially recognized as Caesar's heir.

- ◆ Much of the Senate, although inclined to favor Pompey, had officially taken a neutral, wait-and-see position while the civil war played out. As Caesar's successes continued, some of these senators openly began to side with him. Pompey was now vanquished, but Caesar still had to deal with the hardcore group of senators who were irretrievably opposed to him.
- ◆ The most prominent of these was the stern and inflexible Cato the Younger, who had been especially active in spurring the Senate to issue its ultimatum to Caesar that prompted the civil war, and who had consistently remained a fiery opponent of his. Caesar's Egyptian adventures had kept him away from Rome until late 47 B.C., but he could not stay in Rome long, and soon had to depart once again for Africa, where Cato and the other senators opposing Caesar had gathered their forces.
- ◆ Caesar was outnumbered yet again. After some preliminary fighting, the final battle took place in 46 B.C. near the town of Thapsus. Caesar's legionaries methodically moved forward, slicing through the enemy lines and completely routing their foes. In the aftermath of the battle, a number of the defeated army's leaders committed suicide, Cato among them.
- ◆ Some other leaders, including Pompey's two sons, Gnaeus and Sextus, fled to Spain, where they drew upon Pompey's connections there to organize the opposition to Caesar. Eventually, they would become dangerous enough that Caesar would have to lead one final campaign against them in Spain in early 45 B.C. Following Caesar's victory, the long civil wars were at last over.

CONSPIRACY

- ◆ Caesar was now indisputably the sole ruler of Rome. Given the Romans' long-standing hatred for kings, he had to find a way to rule Rome as one person, but somehow avoid appearing like a king. While his attention was mainly focused on winning the civil wars, he had simply gotten himself elected consul over and over again; but after a few years, this provoked resentment among Roman aristocrats because he was monopolizing one of the two available consulships.

- ◆ Caesar then turned to Roman tradition, where there had been a special government post of dictator to which the Romans occasionally appointed someone in times of extreme emergency. Dictators exercised supreme power over the state, but were strictly limited to no more than a six-month reign. Several times, Caesar got himself appointed dictator for brief periods, and then began stretching this, becoming dictator for a year, and then for renewable terms.



- ◆ Finally, on February 14th, 44 B.C., Caesar arranged to be given the dictatorship as a lifetime appointment. This was an insult to the republic, and was tantamount to being a king. This act provoked great resentment, which was not helped by the fact that Caesar just did not behave very modestly. Caesar was rude to senators, and didn't even try to pretend that they were his peers.
- ◆ These actions led to a general feeling that Caesar was acting too much like a king. People began to look to the politician Marcus Junius Brutus to do something about Caesar and his perceived kingly ambitions. In 44 B.C., a conspiracy of 60 senators, which included both former Pompeians as well as some previous backers of Caesar, coalesced around Brutus.
- ◆ The conspirators carried out their assassination, but they do not seem to have had much of a plan for what to do if they actually succeeded. Perhaps they simply assumed that the Roman Republic would instantly be restored. In the immediate aftermath of the murder, they delivered self-congratulatory orations to the people, in which they declared that they had freed the Roman Republic from tyranny, and they symbolically displayed the red cap traditionally worn by slaves who had been granted freedom.
- ◆ The majority of the Roman people, among whom Caesar had always been very popular, received these declarations sullenly, failing to demonstrate any of the enthusiasm that the assassins had hoped for. Meanwhile, the rest of the Senate fearfully waited to see which way the wind would blow. After all, Caesar's loyal lieutenants, Mark Antony and Lepidus, were in or near Rome, and they might easily summon Caesar's veterans to violently avenge his murder.
- ◆ In the end, the Senate tried to have it both ways, tacitly approving of the actions of the conspirators, but simultaneously officially endorsing all of Caesar's acts and appointments. The conspirators reached an uneasy temporary reconciliation with Antony and Lepidus, and the Senate declared that Caesar would be granted the honor of a state funeral. Now everyone nervously waited to see what would happen next.

Suggested Reading

Gelzer, *Caesar*.

Goldsworthy, *Caesar*.

Questions to Consider

- ✦ Consider the various actions of Caesar once he had achieved victory in the civil war (land reform, public works, celebrations, calendar reform, governing policies, attitudes toward the senate and people). Was he a good ruler? If he had lived longer, would it have been a good thing for Rome?
- ✦ In the end, do you think Caesar really wanted to be king of Rome? Why or why not?



CICERO AND THE ART OF ROMAN ORATORY

LECTURE 22

The late Roman Republic was certainly one of the most dramatic eras in Roman history, and it was a period that produced an astonishing number of famous individuals. Many of them are so well-known that their names are still widely recognized today: Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, Pompey the Great, Cleopatra, Brutus, Crassus, and Octavian. In this environment, one of the most extraordinary individuals was a politician thought by many to be the greatest public speaker of all time.

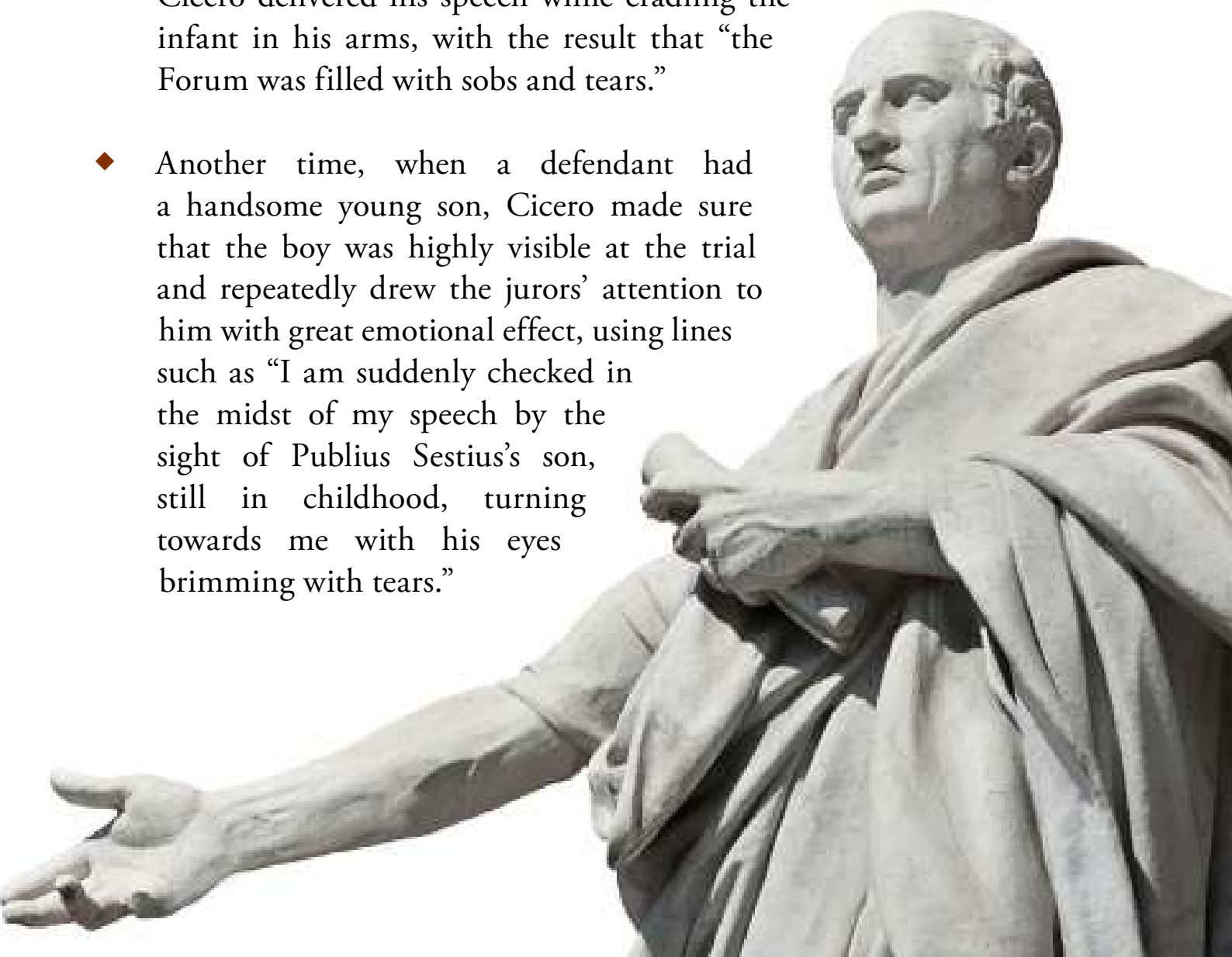
CICERO'S WORK

- ◆ Cicero was born 106 B.C., which means that he was just a few years older than Julius Caesar. Rather than being from one of the established aristocratic or senatorial clans, his family was only of modest equestrian status from the little town of Arpinum. In the political scene at Rome, Cicero was a *novus homo*—a “new man”—and thus had to work extra hard to claw his way up the political ladder.
- ◆ For those studying Cicero and his era, one very useful thing is that he wrote a lot. His surviving writings comprise not only more than three dozen of the speeches that he composed, but also philosophical works, political treatises, and meditative essays on such topics as grief, fate, duty, and religious practices. He even published seven entire volumes consisting exclusively of the letters—more than 900 in number—that he wrote to friends and family, along with many of their replies.
- ◆ Cicero's works include a number of very interesting handbooks describing his ideas regarding how to be an effective and persuasive public speaker, whether making an argument in a courtroom, giving an oration to a crowd of citizens in the forum, or just trying to convince any audience through verbal persuasion.
- ◆ In addition to laying out a philosophy concerning the Roman orator and his role in society, these handbooks discuss issues such as training and education for orators, practical tips and advice on public speaking, how to compose, memorize, and deliver speeches, and they contain a wealth of illustrative examples drawn from previous history as well as Cicero's own experiences.

RHETORICAL SKILL

- ◆ Many ordinary Romans viewed law cases as a form of entertainment. They were considered yet another category of public spectacle, and a case involving a famous figure or a shocking crime or accusation could attract a massive audience. Particularly in the late republic—Cicero’s time—there was a whole string of very high-profile law cases implicating many of the most prominent Romans, who were brought to trial for a range of sensational crimes.
- ◆ Some of the accusations leveled against upper-class defendants at trials of this period include: murder, arson, incest, forgery of public documents, poisoning, adultery with one’s stepmother, corruption, improper use of armed gangs, sacrilege, sexual misconduct, electoral bribery, and even the desecration of a sacred grove.
- ◆ Rome had no class of professional lawyers; instead, politicians who were known as particularly good public speakers were often asked to deliver speeches on behalf of either the prosecution or the defense. The most effective of these politicians could themselves become celebrities and gain coveted status if they were consistently entertaining and successful, or won big, high-profile cases.
- ◆ At the core of Cicero’s approach to persuasion is one fundamental concept: the belief that people are primarily ruled by emotions. Accordingly, Cicero held that if one is trying to persuade an audience, the goal is not necessarily to appeal to logic or reason. While these things are useful, the most essential goal is to stimulate an audience’s emotions.
- ◆ If you can get an audience emotionally invested or riled up, then they can be made to believe whatever you want them to. According to this strategy, if you can but stir up the emotions, then many elements that are usually important—such as facts, evidence, or even the truth—suddenly matter much less. To quote Cicero’s own words, “To sway the audience’s emotions is victory; for among all things it is the single most important in winning verdicts.” He also wrote that “nothing else is more important than emotion.”

- ◆ Cicero employed many different strategies to achieve this end. A particularly interesting one was the use of props and visual aids. Cicero said that an orator is like an actor in this regard; and just like an actor, he has to prepare his stage and furnish it with the necessary props. For example, prior to one speech delivered to the people in the Roman Forum, Cicero arranged for a new statue of the god Jupiter to be set up nearby.
- ◆ Then, during the speech, he alluded to it and asked the crowd how they could possibly stand by and not take action when they were right under the very eyes of the god. The veritable forest of statues of gods, heroes, and famous men that decorated public spaces such as the Roman Forum offered ample opportunities that could be exploited for rhetorical purposes.
- ◆ Props were not limited to statues or inanimate objects. A clever orator like Cicero even made use of human beings as a sort of living prop. Once, when defending a man who had a newborn baby, Cicero delivered his speech while cradling the infant in his arms, with the result that “the Forum was filled with sobs and tears.”
- ◆ Another time, when a defendant had a handsome young son, Cicero made sure that the boy was highly visible at the trial and repeatedly drew the jurors’ attention to him with great emotional effect, using lines such as “I am suddenly checked in the midst of my speech by the sight of Publius Sestius’s son, still in childhood, turning towards me with his eyes brimming with tears.”



- ◆ Another favorite Ciceronian strategy for stirring up emotion was to focus on the personal defects of a person, either real or invented, rather than on their actual policies. Today, we might refer to this as mudslinging, and it allows the speaker to avoid having to engage in real debate about the issues, by instead just attacking his opponent. Another very modern-seeming Ciceronian trick was labeling, which refers to associating abstract positive qualities with oneself, and negative qualities with one's opponent in the listener's mind.

POLITICAL CAREER

- ◆ Cicero had initially associated with both Sulla and Pompey, although in his first important legal case in 80 B.C., Cicero alienated Sulla by attacking some of his followers. He continued to build up his reputation through involvement in a number of other court cases, and was able to parlay these successes into election to a series of political offices. He steadily worked his way up the ladder of magistracies, winning election as a quaestor in 75 B.C., aedile in 69 B.C., and praetor in 66 B.C.
- ◆ Cicero seems to have been a genuine believer in the republican constitution of Rome, and to have been worried by the ascendancy of powerful men such as Sulla, and later Pompey and Caesar, who threatened to overthrow the traditional form of the republic. At the same time, Cicero desperately wanted to join the ranks of Rome's aristocracy, and thus found it expedient to curry favor with such men. This tension would result in some occasionally awkward shifts in allegiance, as Cicero sought to balance his idealistic impulses with his ambitions.
- ◆ His career reached a pinnacle when he succeeded in winning election to the consulship for the year 63 B.C., thus completing his journey from small-town *novus homo* to the highest office in the Roman government. During his tenure as consul, he had to deal with a major political crisis: the so-called conspiracy of Catiline.

- ◆ A longstanding rival of Cicero's was Lucius Sergius Catiline, who ran against him for the consulship in 64 B.C. and lost. Catiline portrayed himself as a champion of various downtrodden groups, such as the poor and debtors, and advocated a radical set of reforms, including the redistribution of land.
- ◆ Having been thwarted in his attempt to institute change through the political process, and under constant verbal attack by Cicero, Catiline withdrew from Rome, and began to organize a possible revolution. While there were many who might have been sympathetic to Catiline, Cicero responded with a series of scathing speeches condemning Catiline that were delivered to both the Senate and people of Rome.
- ◆ These were truly brilliant pieces of invective, and they proved so successful in working up everyone into such a frenzy of fear of Catiline that, after the revolt had been suppressed, Cicero was allowed to have Catiline and his main followers summarily executed without recourse to the usual legal process.



- ◆ For the rest of his life, Cicero would go around crowing that he had neutralized one of the greatest threats ever to confront the Roman Republic. Upon reflection, however, others grew less certain about the necessity of Cicero's actions. Cicero's enemies were able to build upon this sentiment to advocate that he had acted illegally and should be prosecuted for it. It was during this period that the First Triumvirate of Pompey, Crassus, and Caesar formed and was dominating affairs at Rome.
- ◆ By 58 B.C., Cicero's ongoing, ambivalent love/hate relationships with each of these men had reached a nadir, and, without their protection, Cicero found himself vulnerable. One of his most implacable foes, a man named Clodius, introduced a law that would punish anyone who had a Roman citizen put to death without proper trial. Cicero fled from Rome and went into exile in Greece.
- ◆ Cicero's exile lasted 18 months, a period during which he seems to have been profoundly depressed. Soon the tides of political favor shifted again, and Cicero was recalled. When the First Triumvirate broke down, and civil war broke out between Caesar and Pompey and the Senate, Cicero took the side of Pompey and the Senate.
- ◆ Cicero had established enough of a reputation as an independent, and had gained enough respect for his devotion to the idea of the republic, however, that when Caesar defeated Pompey and the Senate, Caesar was willing to pardon Cicero and invite him to participate in government again. This uneasy alliance with Caesar came to an abrupt end on the March 15, 44 B.C., when Brutus and his fellow conspirators assassinated Caesar.
- ◆ Cicero seems to have been uninvolved and unaware of the plot against Caesar, but once the deed was accomplished, the assassins turned to Cicero, seeking his validation and expecting him to take a principal role in leading the Senate, which he somewhat reluctantly did. In this capacity, he helped negotiate the uncomfortable truce with Mark Antony, which at least prevented further bloodshed.

Suggested Reading

Aldrete, *Gestures and Acclamations in Ancient Rome*.

Everitt, *Cicero*.

Morstein-Marx, *Mass Oratory and Political Power in the Late Roman Republic*.

Rawson, *Cicero*.

Questions to Consider

- † Which of the following talents or advantages do you think was the most helpful to an aspiring Roman: oratorical skill, good generalship, great wealth, charisma, personal integrity, family status and connections, or political cleverness? Why?
- † Cicero's techniques for persuading an audience, and especially his strategy of stirring up their emotions, are certainly effective, but how would you assess their morality? What are the advantages and disadvantages of politicians using this sort of oratory?



OCTAVIAN, ANTONY, AND CLEOPATRA

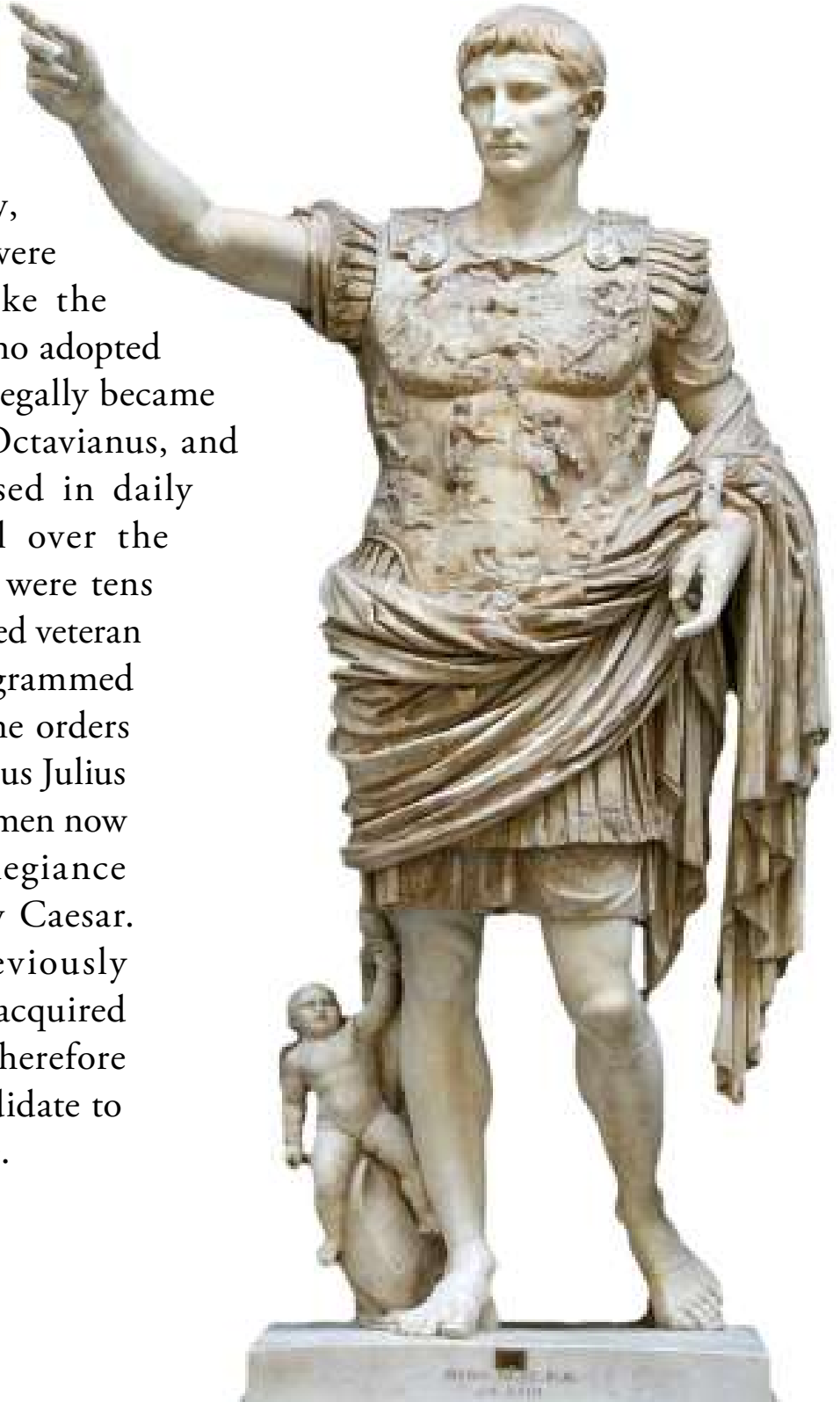
LECTURE 23

The assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 B.C. is one of the most dramatic events in Roman history. When Caesar's will was opened and read after his death, his unexpected choice of heir shifted the course of history in a sequence of events that was more surprising than any plot twist in a sensational novel.

FILLING THE VOID

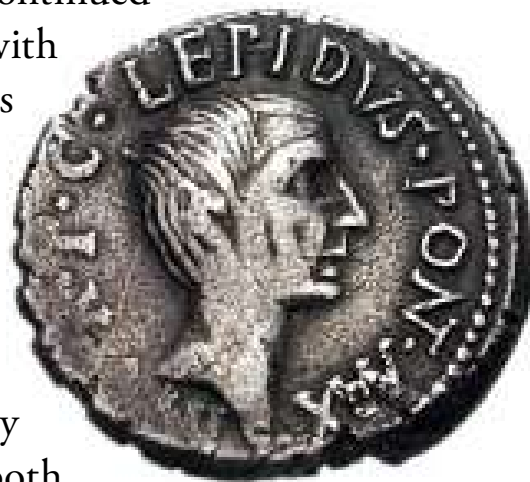
- ◆ When Caesar fell dead beneath a statue of his rival Pompey, stabbed 23 times by the daggers of his assassins, this created a sudden power vacuum in Roman politics. Several different men and groups immediately stepped forward with hopes of filling this void.
- ◆ First, there were the conspirators, the group of senators who had actually killed Caesar. They were led by Caesar's friend, Brutus, and another aristocrat named Cassius. These men claimed that they had murdered Caesar because he had been giving indications that he wished to make himself king of Rome, and they asserted that they had been driven to their act in order to liberate the Roman Republic from Caesar's tyranny.
- ◆ There were also several men who each tried to position themselves as the heir to Caesar's legacy and who now intended to take his place. The most prominent of these was Mark Antony. He was clearly in the strongest position, because he had been Caesar's lieutenant and right-hand man. Antony was also a highly competent general and related well to the common soldier, making him popular with Caesar's veterans.
- ◆ Another of Caesar's former officers, Lepidus, who at the time of Caesar's death was conveniently in command of a legion just outside Rome, also tried to present himself as Caesar's successor. It was a tense situation.
- ◆ Some of the assassins—or, as they now called themselves, “the liberators”—were calling for Caesar to be officially condemned as a tyrant, all his acts to be revoked, and his body flung into the Tiber, the traditional treatment for a criminal. On the other hand, many of the common people of Rome, with whom Caesar had been very popular, were howling for the assassins to be arrested and punished.

- ◆ It appeared that Antony now had the upper hand and was best placed to inherit Caesar's position, but one disquieting note marred his rise. When Caesar's will was read, to everyone's surprise, and to Antony's great annoyance, Antony was not designated as the primary heir. Instead, Caesar named his teenage grand-nephew as the primary heir, and also posthumously adopted him as his son. This 18-year-old nephew was named Gaius Octavianus, commonly referred to today as Octavian.
- ◆ Under Roman law, however, when you were adopted, you can take the name of the person who adopted you. Thus, Octavian legally became Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus, and the name that he used in daily life was Caesar. All over the Mediterranean, there were tens of thousands of hardened veteran soldiers who were programmed to loyally following the orders of someone named Gaius Julius Caesar. Some of these men now transferred their allegiance to Octavian, the new Caesar. Overnight, the previously obscure teenager had acquired his own army, and therefore became the final candidate to vie for Caesar's mantle.



THE SECOND TRIUMVIRATE

- ◆ Octavian was able to build up his position partly because Antony was distracted by other problems. Antony had contrived to get the Senate to grant him Caesar's old provinces in Gaul and northern Italy, and he still commanded a vast army of experienced legions. However, his uneasy truce with the so-called liberators was predictably crumbling, with the result that Brutus, Cassius, and the others were now openly raising armies of their own in various overseas provinces.
- ◆ Lepidus was still a legitimate rival who continued to maneuver against and compete with Antony for the affections of Caesar's veterans. Finally, a long-simmering animosity between Antony and Cicero had finally flared up in number of incidents in which each publicly criticized the other. This culminated in Cicero delivering a series of blisteringly abusive orations against Antony to both the Senate and the people of Rome. Known as the Philippics, these speeches are masterpieces of invective that slandered Antony as an incompetent, a drunkard, a coward, and a dangerously ambitious despot.
- ◆ Antony was now on the defensive, so Cicero pressed his advantage, goading the Senate into openly moving against him. Both consuls for 43 B.C. were dispatched against Antony with a sizable army. To prevent Octavian and his growing number of legions from aiding Antony, Cicero lured the young man over to the Senate's side by granting him membership in the Senate, giving him the same privileges to address the Senate as former consuls, and promising to waive the usual age requirements so that Octavian could prematurely run for election as a consul. Octavian was just 19 years old.



- ◆ Cicero clearly viewed Octavian as the lesser of two evils compared to Antony, and apparently believed that he could control the younger man and bend him to his will. Like nearly everyone else, Cicero seems to have greatly underestimated Octavian. Cicero's strategy of using and then discarding Octavian is revealed by his dismissive comment that, "this young man should be praised, honored, and then done away with."
- ◆ In this crisis, Antony displayed the energetic military talent that had earned him a place as one of Caesar's lieutenants. He escaped the armies sent to entrap him and took refuge in Gaul, where he sought the aid of Lepidus, who was then holding Spain. While the senatorial forces seemed to have won a victory, in the process, both the consuls were killed. Nevertheless, the Senate's position appeared fairly strong: Antony was on his heels and the Senate's allies, the Liberators, had solidified their control over the eastern Mediterranean.
- ◆ In the awarding of honors for having driven back Antony, Octavian was noticeably slighted by the Senate, which also summarily rejected his requests for rewards for his men and that he be given one of the now-vacant consulships. Octavian had had enough of Cicero's and the Senate's disrespect, so he responded to these snubs by promptly marching on Rome with his legions, which by now had grown to eight.
- ◆ Octavian soon sought reconciliation with Antony. In 43 B.C., the three rivals for Caesar's legacy—Antony, Lepidus, and Octavian—agreed to unite, at least temporarily, in order to deal with the threat posed by the Senate and the liberators. This alliance became known as the Second Triumvirate.
- ◆ Unlike the First Triumvirate, created by Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus, which was merely an informal coalition, the Second Triumvirate was a legally defined, formal pact. In it, the triumvirs divided up the western half of the empire among themselves. Antony got northern Italy and Gaul, Lepidus received Spain and Transalpine Gaul, while Octavian was left with Sardinia, Sicily, and North Africa.

- ◆ By this division, it is clear that Octavian was still very much the junior member of the triumvirate. They also revived Sulla's practice of proscribing enemies, and had 130 senators and 2,000 equites put to death. As revenge for having been slandered in his speeches, Antony insisted that Cicero's name be put on the list. Cicero was hunted down and killed in December of 43 B.C.
- ◆ Some of the proscribed had escaped their death sentences by fleeing to the eastern Mediterranean and uniting with the liberators. The battle lines were now clearly drawn between the two sides, and the final confrontation took place at a pair of battles fought near the town of Philippi in Macedonia. Octavian, who was not a gifted general, was defeated on his part of the battlefield, but Mark Antony was victorious in his section and managed to secure the overall victory. Rather than be captured by their foes, Cassius and Brutus both committed suicide.



ANTONY AND OCTAVIAN

- ◆ With the liberators out of the way, the members of the Second Triumvirate quickly turned against one another. With his prestige at a highpoint as a result of his victory on the battlefield of Philippi, Antony seized the entire eastern Mediterranean for himself, while retaining his control over Gaul. Within the triumvirate, the balance of power had shifted heavily toward Antony, with Lepidus's fortunes waning. Lepidus was left with North Africa and a sizable army, but his influence over the policies of the triumvirate was in decline.
- ◆ The real rivalry was now between Antony and Octavian, but neither one was quite ready for open conflict. Caesar's veterans, who, after all, formed the backbones of both of their armies, were vocal in their reluctance to wage war against their former comrades. After a bit of skirmishing in 40 B.C., the two men agreed to another truce, in which Antony would control the east and Octavian the west.
- ◆ This arrangement was very much in Antony's favor, because it gave him the richer, more urbanized portion of the empire, and it also saddled Octavian with the considerable problem of having to deal with the dangerous Sextus Pompey, who by now had consolidated his hold over Sicily and effectively controlled sea traffic in the western Mediterranean with his sizable navy. To cement the new agreement, Octavian's sister was forced to marry Antony.
- ◆ Sextus Pompey was threatening to cut off food supplies to Italy, so Octavian now made the war against him a priority. For all his talents as a politician, however, Octavian had proven himself to be at best a mediocre or even subpar military commander. His initial attempts at invading Sicily ended in disaster, with Octavian suffering two crushing naval defeats at the hands of Sextus.



- ◆ Fortunately for Octavian, one of his closest, most trusted, companions was a childhood friend named Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, who just happened to be an outstanding general and strategist. Furthermore, Agrippa was atypically modest for a Roman, and was willing to fight wars on Octavian's behalf, while allowing Octavian to gain the official credit for them.
- ◆ It was a beneficial partnership for both men. Agrippa lacked Octavian's social skills and political cleverness, but by serving as Octavian's loyal right-hand man and subordinating his ambitions to those of his friend, he could achieve greater power than he ever would have acquired on his own.
- ◆ Octavian now summoned Agrippa to the scene to lead the military campaign against Sextus, while he himself concentrated on diplomacy, managing to convince Antony and Lepidus that they should lend assistance by contributing ships and troops to his efforts against Sextus. The three men formally renewed their Triumvirate in 37 B.C. and, bolstered by these reinforcements, Octavian launched the assault against Sextus.
- ◆ Octavian was again defeated in a naval battle, but it didn't matter; Agrippa won the decisive victory over Sextus's fleet at the Battle of Naulochus. Extravagant honors were lavished upon Octavian at Rome for his alleged great victory over Sextus, including the erection of a golden statue of him in the Forum, and the bestowal upon him of the coveted title of *imperator*, or "victorious general."

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

- ◆ In the east, Antony had met up with Cleopatra, the queen of Egypt, which was the richest and most powerful independent kingdom remaining around the shores of the Mediterranean. The two commenced an affair. It seems to have been based at least as much on genuine love as political expediency. Antony had always had an inclination toward indulgence, and he and Cleopatra engaged in riotous parties at which he dressed up in a leopard skin as the god Dionysus while Cleopatra assumed the role of the goddess Isis.

- ◆ With their relations strained by Antony's rejection of Octavian's sister, war between the two men seemed inevitable, and each tried to strengthen his position for the coming conflict. While Octavian had clearly been anticipating an eventual showdown with Antony from an early stage, Antony appears to have been a bit slow to realize the seriousness of the threat that the younger man posed. He had also been distracted by tensions and skirmishing with the powerful kingdom of Parthia, which lay along his eastern border.



- ◆ Octavian could not match Antony's financial resources, so he took a different path. He began to wage what, in modern terms, we would call a war of propaganda against Antony. Octavian posed as the champion of the Roman Republic against a dangerous foreign enemy personified by Cleopatra. Because Cleopatra was a queen, by openly presenting himself as her consort, Antony had fallen into the trap of looking like a king, so Octavian was able to exploit the traditional Roman fear and hatred of monarchs to good effect.
- ◆ While Antony was an able general, he was clumsy when it came to this sort of war for public opinion, and many of his own actions cluelessly played right into Octavian's hands. For example, he bestowed large territories in the east upon Cleopatra and openly portrayed his children with her as royal monarchs who would inherit the entire east. While he probably intended these acts as merely local ones done in order to curry favor with the Egyptians, at Rome, they stirred up considerable alarm and resentment.
- ◆ These efforts culminated in Octavian illegally obtaining Antony's will and publishing its contents, which dictated that he be buried in Egypt and lavished benefactions on his children with Cleopatra—provisions which further inflamed public sentiment against him. However, not all Romans were swayed by Octavian's propaganda campaign, and, with war looming, several hundred senators departed Rome to join Antony.
- ◆ Left even more firmly in charge at Rome, Octavian connived to have Cleopatra officially declared a public enemy of the Roman state. This was a brilliant move because it placed Antony in the position of either having to sever his ties with Cleopatra and lose his financial backing, or else remain loyal to her and find himself by law in collusion with an enemy of Rome. Antony, who really did seem to have fallen in love with Cleopatra, chose to stay with her.
- ◆ The long-anticipated war was finally openly declared in 32 B.C. Antony still appeared to have the advantage, with the larger army, more resources, and a clear superiority over Octavian as a general; but Octavian once again turned to his faithful companion Agrippa, and placed him in complete

charge of his strategy. Rather than seeking a direct confrontation with Antony's main forces immediately, Agrippa instead cleverly launched a series of quick raids against Antony's supply depots.

- ◆ These small victories bolstered the morale of Octavian's men while confounding and frustrating Antony. More importantly, Agrippa seized the initiative and steadily nibbled away at Antony's naval strength. Antony was slow to react, with the result that his main army eventually found itself blockaded and short of food, leading to starvation and disease.
- ◆ Having forced Antony into a position of disadvantage, Agrippa was now ready to commit to the main assault. The ensuing decisive naval battle between Octavian's forces and the combined fleet of Antony and Cleopatra took place on September 2, 31 B.C., at the Battle of Actium. Agrippa thoroughly out-maneuvered Antony, and won the victory for Octavian.
- ◆ When they saw the fight turning against them, Antony and Cleopatra abandoned their fleet and fled the scene in swift ships, managing to escape to Egypt. Once there, knowing that Octavian would relentlessly pursue them, rather than be captured, both chose to commit suicide.



- ◆ Octavian was left in sole command of the Roman world. He had won the military battle, but still faced a greater problem: how to rule Rome as one man and not be killed for seeming like a king. Julius Caesar had also attained total power, but had then spectacularly failed to solve this puzzle. Now it would be Octavian's turn to attempt this ultimate challenge.

Suggested Reading

Everitt, *Augustus*.

Gurval, *Actium and Augustus*.

Goldsworthy, *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*.

Questions to Consider

- † Octavian's rise from obscurity to total power seems an unlikely story. What do you think were the key factors or events that made it possible?
- † In the power struggle following Caesar's assassination that was waged among Octavian, Antony, Lepidus, the liberators, and Cicero and the Senate, which group or person are you most sympathetic to, and whose victory do you think would have been best for Rome as a whole?



WHY THE ROMAN REPUBLIC COLLAPSED

LECTURE 24

A number of factors played a part in the rise of the Roman Republic. Among these are the geographic and economic advantages of Rome's location, the balance of power set forth in the Roman constitution, the competition for status among Roman aristocrats, and the aggressively warlike nature of Roman culture. In this lecture, you will explore the similarly complex web of factors and relationships that led to the republic's downfall and ultimate collapse.

THE WAY DOWN

- ◆ The Romans themselves speculated quite a lot about the reasons why their Republic failed. The most commonly cited explanation offered by ancient authors was that it was due to a fatal degeneration of morals. Influential Roman authors such as Livy, Cicero, Sallust, and Plutarch expressed this sentiment, and this explanation has proven to be a popular one among subsequent writers and scholars from antiquity up until the present.
- ◆ Another major theory focuses on the institutions of the Roman Republic, arguing that the particular government and institutions that Rome developed when it was just a small city-state, and that were quite successful within that context, proved wholly inadequate when Rome had grown into a large empire that had to govern vast overseas territories. The theory that the fall of the republic was sparked by institutional failure can also trace its origins back to ancient authors such as Tacitus, and it has been an especially widespread conceit among modern historians.
- ◆ The Romans were a profoundly traditional people who were suspicious of and highly resistant to change. While their deep-rooted adoration of tradition could be a strength, it also made them inflexible and slow to react. This resistance to change was a major factor in their failure to deal with the inequalities and imbalances spawned by their own successes in conquering the Mediterranean.
- ◆ Roman imperialism unintentionally created a vicious circle in which the more wars that were fought, the more ordinary citizens sold their farms to become soldiers. Few actually realized their dreams of returning home laden with riches, so these veterans ended up disgruntled and unemployed.

Meanwhile, the plum generalships and government offices that brought coveted glory to their holders became monopolized by a smaller and smaller number of elites, resulting in the majority of aristocrats feeling resentful and left out.

- ◆ Italian half-citizens and allies similarly seethed with anger at not sharing in the fruits of empire, while the conquered peoples found themselves exploited or outright enslaved. Thus, in an odd paradox, Rome's triumphant subjugation of the Mediterranean resulted in almost every segment of Roman society becoming filled with bitter resentment. The institutional explanation for the collapse of the republic places the blame on the Romans themselves for being unwilling to adapt to face these new realities.

QUESTIONING THE FALL

- ◆ Just as the cause of the fall of the republic is much debated, so too is the exact moment of its demise. While Octavian's victory over Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C. is perhaps the most commonly cited event marking this transition, arguments have been put forward for



many other possible dates, stretching back as far as the ascendancy of Scipio Africanus in the 3rd century B.C., and forward to various points during the early Roman Empire in the 1st century A.D.

- ◆ Octavian himself would have strenuously objected to the assertion that the Roman Republic reached its endpoint with his victory at Actium. Rather, he spent a great deal of effort loudly and repeatedly proclaiming that all he had done was intended to restore the Roman Republic to its previous condition and glory.
- ◆ Many Romans appear to have bought into Octavian's interpretation, at least publicly. For example, speaking of Octavian's actions, the Roman historian Velleius Paterculus wrote: "Twenty years of civil wars were ended, foreign wars were suppressed, peace restored, the frenzy of arms everywhere put to rest; validity was restored to the laws, authority to the courts, and dignity to the Senate. ... The old traditional form of the republic was restored."

THE POLYBIAN CYCLE OF GOVERNMENTS

- ◆ To account for Rome's remarkable success in conquering the Mediterranean, the Greek historian Polybius asserted that it was due to the peculiar nature of the Roman constitution, which divided power among three groups—the Senate, the people, and the magistrates—thereby creating a government which beneficially blended together elements of an aristocracy, a democracy, and a monarchy. Furthermore, these three branches of government were interdependent and could serve to check one another.
- ◆ In his work, Polybius lays out a grand theory proposing that governments naturally and inevitably evolve through a distinct sequence of different forms. Polybius hypothesizes a cyclical progression of seven stages that form an endless loop called *anacyclosis*.
- ◆ Polybius begins with human beings in a sort of anarchic condition without political structures. Eventually, a strong leader emerges who brings order and direction for the good of all, and thereby gains the respect and fealty of the group. They willingly bestow the mantle of authority upon him, and thus the first king is established, and, the first stage of the cycle—kingship.

- ◆ Over time, however, subsequent monarchs start to grow arrogant and to abuse their position of power through arbitrary or unjust actions, and the kingship degenerates into the second phase, tyranny. These outrages provoke a group of the wealthiest and most dynamic men to organize together and ultimately overthrow the tyrant.
- ◆ Those who overthrew the tyrant then take charge of running the state in a collective fashion, sharing power among themselves, and the third phase, aristocracy, is born. While the initial group acts with the interests of all in mind, once again, over subsequent generations, their descendants become addicted to wealth and status and think only of themselves, and aristocracy degenerates into its corrupt form, oligarchy.



- ◆ The ordinary people grow weary of oligarchical abuses, Polybius suggested, and finally reach a point where they rebel and kill or expel the oligarchs. Recalling their ill treatment, they do not wish to reinstate either a kingship or an aristocracy, so by necessity they themselves take up the reins of government and create a democracy. Equality and freedom of speech form two of the cornerstones of this democracy. For a time, there is harmony and prosperity. But soon corruption again creeps in.
- ◆ Greed leads to inequality and affluence fosters a sense of entitlement. Both create resentment among the populace. Unscrupulous leaders arise who play upon these feelings by making extravagant promises but in reality are only concerned with enhancing their own power. With the rise of these demagogues, democracy devolves into the next phase, mob rule. At some point, either one of the demagogues emerges as dominant over all the others and seizes sole control of the state, or there is a general collapse into anarchy followed by the emergence of a new strongman, and the entire cycle repeats itself.
- ◆ Keep in mind, Polybius himself lived at the height of the success of the Roman Republic in the 2nd century B.C., not during the late republic when it was actually collapsing. Polybius optimistically believed that the Romans had solved the puzzle of how to stop the perpetual cycle, and they did this by crafting a constitution that mixed together elements of all three of the positive forms of government: kingship, aristocracy, and democracy. He believed that by blending these three forms together at the same time in the same government, the Romans had found a way to arrest their decay, and to avoid the perils of their negative manifestations, tyranny, oligarchy, and mob rule.
- ◆ As we have seen, however, the Romans' solution was not permanent, and the republic did eventually collapse, falling into chaotic mob rule, witnessing the rise of demagogues, and ultimately resulting in the establishment of a new monarch-like figure in the form of Octavian. Thus, it might appear as if Rome's mixed constitution only temporarily managed to arrest the turning of the *anacyclosis* wheel, and that, in the end, the Roman Republic fell prey to all the usual ills predicted by Polybius's scheme.

LESSONS FOR MODERN REPUBLICS

- ◆ It is worth considering the long shadow that the memory of the Roman Republic has cast over subsequent western civilization, and the strong influence that it has wielded over recent history. Perhaps the most important manifestation of this influence in the last few centuries has been by serving as a direct inspiration for both the American and French revolutions, and for the republics each country set up in their aftermaths.
- ◆ In the last two decades of the 18th century, the government of France went through an accelerated version of the ancient Roman Republic's collapse and fall. Just like Rome, France transitioned from monarchy to a republic via a revolution, and created magistrates bearing the names senator, consul, and tribune. In ancient Rome, Julius Caesar and Octavian then rose up as popular leaders in the system, first stretching its institutions by holding multiple consulships and triumvirates, and then supplanting them altogether. This was the same arc followed in France by Napoleon Bonaparte.



- ◆ The American Founding Fathers were also inspired by the Roman Republic, and quite self-consciously thought of themselves as an improved version of it. Currently, the political experiment of the American Republic is well into its third century of existence and, while the respective histories and contexts of ancient Rome and the United States are too dissimilar to make direct comparisons, one can hope that the failure of the Roman Republic may at least suggest some of the dangers and flaws that to which such Republics can potentially fall victim.

Suggested Reading

Brunt, *The Fall of the Roman Republic and Related Essays*.

Morstein-Marx and Rosenstein, "The Transformation of the Republic."

Walbank, *Polybius*.

Questions to Consider

- ✦ Which of the various explanations for the collapse of the Roman Republic do you find most compelling, and why?
- ✦ Do you agree with Polybius's *anacyclosis* theory of types of government? Do you believe that each type of government must inevitably degenerate into its negative form?

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The Roman Empire

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Professor Aldrete has won many awards for his teaching, including two national ones: He was named the Wisconsin Professor of the Year by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and he received an Award for Excellence in Teaching at the College Level from the Society for Classical Studies. At the state level, he was selected from among all professors in the University of Wisconsin System to receive a System Regents Teaching Excellence Award, and his campus granted him its highest teaching award, the Faculty Award for Excellence in Teaching from the university's Founders Association.

Professor Aldrete has been honored with a number of fellowships, including two yearlong humanities fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Solmsen Fellowship at the Institute for Research in the Humanities in Madison, Wisconsin. Additionally, he was a fellow of two NEH seminars held at the American Academy in Rome and was a participant in an NEH institute at the University of California, Los Angeles. Professor Aldrete was the Martha Sharp Joukowsky Lecturer for the Archaeological Institute of America, for which he gave a series of public lectures across the United States.

Professor Aldrete's innovative Linothorax Project, in which he and his students reconstructed and tested ancient linen body armor, has garnered considerable media attention; it has been featured in documentaries on the Discovery Channel, the Smithsonian Channel, and the National Geographic Channel as well as on television programs in Canada and across Europe. His research has also been the subject of articles in *U.S. News and World Report*, *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Der Spiegel* magazine, and *Military History* and of internet news stories in more than two dozen countries.

Professor Aldrete's other Great Courses are *History of the Ancient World: A Global Perspective*; *The Decisive Battles of World History*; *History's Great Military Blunders and the Lessons They Teach*; and *The Rise of Rome*. ■

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THE ROMAN EMPIRE

FROM AUGUSTUS TO THE FALL OF ROME

At its height, the Roman Empire spanned the entire Mediterranean and included more than 60 million inhabitants. The empire was one of the most famous and influential states in all of world history, and the story of its spectacular rise and disastrous fall has exerted an irresistible fascination for the last 2,000 years. Roman contributions to art, architecture, law, language, religion, science, philosophy, and culture still surround and constantly affect us today. Rome's military triumphs have inspired generations of would-be conquerors, and the famed discipline and organization of its legions have provided models for countless later armies.

This course begins with the first emperor, Augustus, who emerged as the ultimate winner of the vicious cycle of civil wars that caused the destruction of the Roman Republic. You will discover how he created the new institution of the Roman principate, establishing the model that would be emulated by all subsequent emperors. The course then traces the dramatic history of the empire under a succession of good leaders and bad, from the depravity of mad Caligula to the stoic philosophical musings of Marcus Aurelius. You will see how the empire reaches a geographic, cultural, military, and economic high point in the 2nd century AD under the enlightened rule of the Antonine emperors but then comes to the brink of collapse during the so-called crisis of the 3rd century due to a deadly combination of government instability, barbarian invasions, and economic crises. A series of tough-minded reformers, such as Diocletian, stabilize the situation, and then events take an unexpected turn early in the 4th century, when Constantine becomes the first emperor to convert to Christianity. Soon, new waves of barbarians challenge Rome, and the empire splits, with the western half eventually falling in the 5th century while the eastern section manages to continue for nearly another millennium in the guise of the Byzantine Empire, centered on Constantinople. The final lectures of the course take an in-depth look at the complex questions of when exactly the Roman Empire fell, why it fell, whether the period of late antiquity was a time of destruction and loss or innovation and new growth, and what the long-term influences of Rome were upon the modern world.


Interspersed throughout this grand chronological narrative are a number of lectures that illuminate specific key aspects of Roman civilization, including art, architecture, bath culture, literature, the Roman army, spectacular entertainments (such as gladiator shows and chariot racing), and the many hazards of daily life in the Roman city. In addition to relating the remarkable stories of famous Roman emperors, generals, authors, and artists, several lectures are devoted to recovering the lost voices of ordinary Roman men, women, children, and slaves through a close examination of often-ignored source materials, such as graffiti scratched or painted on walls and the inscriptions carved on Roman tombstones.

This course presents a lively, engaging account of the rise and fall of the Roman Empire accompanied by insightful and in-depth investigations of the key factors and personalities that shaped its history. ■



DAWN OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

LECTURE 1

 On September 2, 31 BC, an ambitious 31-year-old Roman politician named Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus, commonly referred to as Octavian, surveyed the chaotic aftermath of a ferocious naval battle off the western coast of Greece. The event was recorded in history as the Battle of Actium, and its outcome made Octavian the ruler of the known world. The Battle of Actium was a decisive turning point in world history because it marked the final collapse of the Roman Republic and resulted in the creation of the Roman Empire.

The Rise of the Republic

Octavian's victory at Actium was the culmination of more than half a century of destructive civil wars that had torn apart the Roman Republic and undermined its institutions. The Roman Republic had come into being 500 years earlier, when the then-small and rather insignificant city-state of Rome had overthrown the last of its kings and established in their place a form of government that shared political power among a group of citizens.

The important offices in the government were filled by annual elections in which all citizens cast votes for their favorite candidates. While this might sound quite democratic, real power was concentrated in the hands of a set of influential, wealthy families from whose ranks almost all of the elected magistrates were chosen.

Nevertheless, it was a far more egalitarian system than the monarchies that were the standard political structure of the time, and it succeeded in harnessing the abilities and energy of a broad segment of the citizen body. Although not all citizens were truly equal, Roman citizenship did convey significant benefits and protections as well as responsibilities—most notably, service in the military.

Rome liked to think of itself at this time as a nation of tough and pragmatic farmer-citizen-soldiers, and there is a fair amount of truth to this stereotype. As is usually the case in the ancient world, however, it is worth keeping in mind that even in the relatively radical political structure of the Roman Republic, large segments of the populace, such as women and slaves, were excluded from full participation in this system and had an inferior legal and social status.

Over the next several centuries, the city of Rome gradually conquered its neighbors and expanded its territory—first in central Italy and then throughout the peninsula. In these early wars, Rome was neither technologically nor tactically superior to its foes, and its army was really only a citizen militia, but the Roman people did display a dogged resilience and determination so that even when they suffered repeated military defeats and disasters, they simply regrouped and came back until they finally won.

Rome also pursued an unusual policy with regard to its defeated enemies in Italy. Rather than enslaving the conquered people, Rome more typically shared gradated degrees of membership in the Roman system with them, bestowing full citizenship on a few favored elites, awarding half-citizenship to some, and giving others the status of allies.

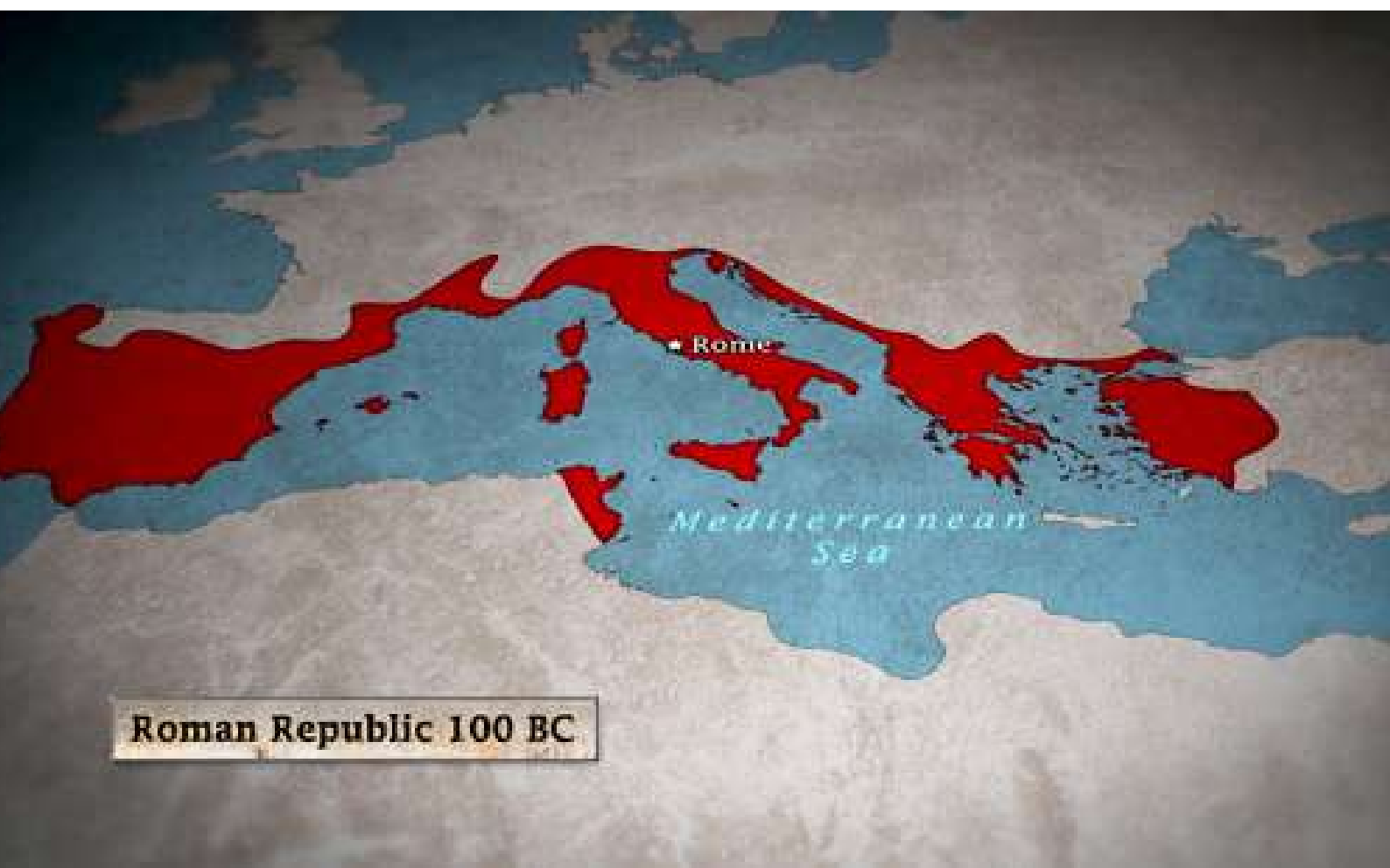
Each of these categories came with a distinct level of rights and responsibilities, but all had the effect of incorporating and Romanizing these former enemies. The one universal requirement for all was to provide troops to the Roman army, a practice that encouraged further conquests and gave Rome a decisive edge in battle by affording them nearly inexhaustible manpower reserves.

By about 250 BC, Rome had brought the entire Italian peninsula under its sway and then immediately launched into a series of wars with overseas foes. The greatest and most dangerous of these were the Punic Wars, fought against the rival up-and-coming empire of Carthage. Under the inspired leadership of Hannibal, one of history's great military geniuses, Carthage nearly defeated Rome. But in the end, the Romans prevailed and emerged from the crucible of the Punic Wars hardened and with a formidable, well-trained, and semiprofessional military that would prove superior to any contemporary Mediterranean opponents.

At the beginning of the 2nd century BC, by which time Rome had established hegemony over the western Mediterranean, it was the eastern half that was in reality the more affluent, more urban, and far more culturally sophisticated area. The east was the Hellenistic world, ruled by a set of powerful kingdoms formed out of the breakup of Alexander the Great's empire and dominated by erudite Greek culture. To the wealthy and refined peoples of the east, the Romans seemed like uncouth and crude brutes.

Although the Romans may have been culturally unsophisticated, they were dynamic and possessed a highly efficient military, and they burst onto the Hellenistic world like an explosion. In a few decades, they smashed their way across the eastern Mediterranean, toppling one proud Hellenistic kingdom after another. These conquests came as quite a shock to the Greeks, but there was little they could do to resist the Roman juggernaut.

When Rome moved outside of Italy, it adopted a new policy toward conquered regions, becoming less generous in bestowing degrees of citizenship and instead treating these areas as subjugated zones organized administratively into tax-paying Roman provinces under the rule of a Roman governor.



The vanquishing of the Hellenized eastern Mediterranean had several long-term effects on Rome. Specifically, Rome acquired riches on a vast scale, and the Romans adopted much of Greek culture and incorporated it into their own.

The Fall of the Republic

Rome had been stunningly successful in conquering the Mediterranean, but these external triumphs ended up creating dire internal problems in the Roman Republic. The fruits of conquest were not evenly distributed, and by the dawn of the 1st century BC, nearly every segment of society was burning with resentment, including the half-citizens and allies in Italy, ordinary Roman citizens, enslaved foreigners, and even the elite families.

These resentments steadily grew until they boiled over during the late republic, conventionally defined as the period between a failed attempt at reform in 133 BC and the Battle of Actium in 31 BC. As the republic staggered along under increasing strain, its institutions and traditions were eroded. This era also saw the rise of a series of dangerous strongmen who put their personal ambitions above the good of the state, including Pompey the Great and Julius Caesar, whose rivalry ended in a cataclysmic civil war from which Caesar emerged the winner.



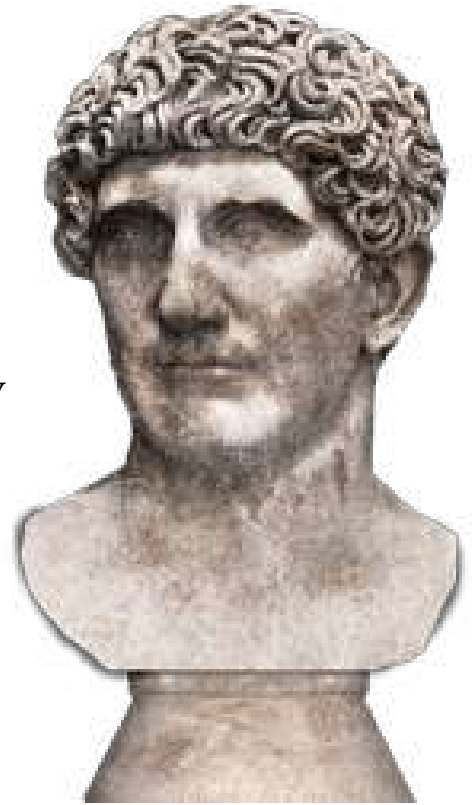
While Caesar's talents brought him military victory, he failed to find a way to rule Rome as one man without provoking the Romans' traditional and extreme antipathy to monarchy. He was assassinated by a conspiracy of senators on the Ides of March, 44 BC.

Caesar's death created a power vacuum that a number of groups and individuals then sought to fill. These included several of Caesar's former officers—most notably Marcus Antonius, often simply called Mark Antony, who was the strongest and in the best position to take control of the Roman state.

In a surprise development, however, when Caesar's will was read, it was discovered that he had posthumously adopted as his son a previously unknown and undistinguished grandnephew known as Octavian, who proved to be an extremely clever and manipulative young man, parlaying his link to Caesar into a certain degree of political power and becoming one of the rivals vying to take Caesar's place.

In the decade following Caesar's assassination, Antony, Octavian, and other former Caesarian officers temporarily aligned but ultimately turned on one another. Eventually, it came down to just Antony and Octavian, who deferred their final confrontation for quite a while, in the meantime effectively dividing up the Roman world between them, with Antony holding the richer eastern half and Octavian controlling the west, including Rome. During this period, Antony encountered Cleopatra, the ruler of Egypt, and the two embarked on a famous love affair.

When war finally broke out, it seemed as if Antony might have the edge. He had a large and loyal army, could call upon the substantial wealth and resources of his ally Cleopatra, and possessed a huge advantage over Octavian when it came to ability as a general. But Octavian could draw upon the talents of a loyal and self-effacing friend, Marcus Agrippa, a gifted admiral and general who was willing to fight Octavian's battles for him but allow Octavian to claim all the credit.



The Aftermath of Actium

The war of Octavian versus Antony and Cleopatra culminated with the Battle of Actium, won in crushing fashion by Agrippa's fleet. Antony and Cleopatra managed to sneak through the cordon of Agrippa's warships and escape to Egypt. As long as they remained free, the war could not really be declared over, and therefore Octavian now turned his attention to their pursuit.

First, however, he had to briefly return to Italy to arrange rewards for some of his own long-serving legions, who were threatening mutiny. He soothed the disgruntled troops and, after only a month, returned to the east to organize the assault on Egypt. Antony and Cleopatra still posed a credible threat; Cleopatra could draw upon the substantial wealth of Egypt and Antony still possessed significant military forces.

But Antony's men were demoralized, and more and more troops began to abandon his cause. Antony boldly led his entire army and navy out to confront Octavian's forces, but instead of fighting, all of his warships switched sides, and all of his soldiers ran from the battlefield. In despair, Antony returned to Alexandria, where he fell on his own sword and expired in Cleopatra's arms.



Octavian triumphantly took possession of Alexandria, of Egypt and its riches, and of Cleopatra herself, who died shortly after. He returned to Rome in August of 30 BC and celebrated a triple triumph in which the loot acquired in Egypt was paraded through the streets of the city. The memory of Antony was systematically besmirched; all of his statues were smashed. Meanwhile, to bolster his own popularity, Octavian bestowed largesse upon the Romans on an unprecedented scale.

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Brunt, *The Fall of the Roman Republic and Related Essays*.

Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic*.

Gurval, *Actium and Augustus*.

Huzar, *Mark Antony*.

QUESTIONS

1. Of all the problems that the Roman Republic faced, which was the greatest? Did the problems the republic faced make the rise of a figure like Octavian, who would take over the republic, inevitable?
2. In the struggle for supremacy between Octavian and Mark Antony, to what degree, or in what sense, is Mark Antony a tragic figure? Do you think he could have won the war between them?

Octavian would become Rome's first emperor, and the political system that he created would endure for the next half a millennium. This system would become the template for countless later empires up through the present day, and he would become the model emperor against whom all subsequent ones would be measured.

The culture and history of the Mediterranean basin, the Western world, and even global history itself were all profoundly shaped and influenced by the actions and legacy of Octavian. He was the founder of the Roman Empire, and we still live today in the world that he created.



AUGUSTUS, THE FIRST EMPEROR

LECTURE 2

Once Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus had defeated all rivals to become the sole ruler of the Roman world, he would go on to become the first Roman emperor under the name Augustus. The greatest challenge he faced now was how to permanently consolidate power in a way that would be palatable to the Romans.



Learning from Julius Caesar's negative example, Octavian knew that he could not act arrogantly, nor openly disrespect the senate, nor show contempt for the traditional institutions of the republic. He could not monopolize offices and, above all, had to avoid appearing too much like a king. Caesar had done all of these things, and the result had been his assassination.

The Creation of the Principate

On January 13, 27 BC, at a meeting of the senate, Octavian began revealing his response to the challenge of power consolidation. He theatrically announced that he was returning all of his accumulated power to the senate and people of Rome. In what was likely a prearranged performance, he was then reluctantly persuaded to retain control over a few of the provinces—Syria, Gaul, Cilicia in Asia Minor, Egypt, and the two provinces of Hispania. But even these he did not rule directly, instead delegating his power to legates who acted as the governors of these regions.

Octavian had already held a number of consecutive consulships, and would continue to do so for a few more years, but most of the government offices, including the majority of the provincial governorships, would now be filled in the traditional way, through election, or else with candidates chosen by the senate.



While on the surface it might appear that he was surrendering power, the reality was quite different. It is no coincidence that the handful of provinces that remained under Octavian's direct control were precisely those that contained the overwhelming majority of the Roman army.

Under this arrangement, 23 of Rome's 28 legions would be commanded by men who had been handpicked by Octavian and whose allegiance lay first and foremost with him. Often, ultimate power in a state resides with the person or institution who commands the loyalty of the troops, and the creation of these so-called imperial provinces ensured that if it came to the use of open force, Octavian would be the victor.

Thus, military power formed one leg of the structure that would support Octavian's new system of government.

A second had already begun to be implemented in 30 BC, when he had arranged for the senate to bestow upon him the powers of a tribune—but not the actual office of tribune itself.

The tribuneship was one of the traditional offices in the Roman government, and 10 of these magistrates were elected by the citizen body every year. Among their important powers were the ability to convene the citizen voting assembly and propose new legislation to it as well as the power to effectively veto almost any government act or law. Tribunes also enjoyed a special sanctity in Roman culture intended to protect them from harm when in performance of their duties.

In 29 BC, in addition to the tribunician power, Octavian was granted the power of censor. Censors in the republican government not only had the responsibility to conduct the census, but also to revise the list of citizens and to add or remove individuals from the rolls based on various criteria, including a subjective assessment of their supposed moral character.

Octavian would eventually amass the powers of additional magistracies until it would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that the powers collectively wielded by him equaled those of the entire rest of the state.

This strategy of being granted the powers of certain offices—but, crucially, not the offices themselves—was a brilliant innovation. It meant that on a day-to-day basis, it appeared as if everything was business as usual in the Roman Republic. The people continued to elect officials, as they had done for centuries, and those officials exercised power and seemed to run the government.

Yet lurking behind this superficially republican system was Octavian, and if anything ever happened that he did not like, he could pop up and exercise one of his many powers to arrange matters to his satisfaction.

However, the fact he was not one of the official magistrates at any given time and that he was not constantly seen to be wielding power had the practical effect of lulling people into believing that he was not really in control. To a modern observer, this may seem a tenuous fiction for the Romans to have bought into, but for a people weary of decades of brutal civil strife, it was a falsehood that they were willing to accept.

This policy had the additional benefit that Octavian was not monopolizing the higher offices of government, and thus Roman aristocrats could go on competing with one another for them as they always had and could perhaps convince themselves that the structure of the Roman Republic still existed.

A third leg supporting Octavian's settlement concerned the difficult question of finding a name or title by which to call himself. While in reality his position was monarchical, he obviously could not openly label himself a king.

To solve this dilemma, Octavian devised a remarkably clever solution that, while actually being innovative, gave the appearance of simply following established traditions. He took on not just one name or title, but a plethora of them, each of which individually didn't seem that intimidating or autocratic but collectively bestowed unprecedented status and prestige upon him.

Additionally, all of these names or titles either had republican precedents or were based on long-standing cultural concepts—so that it seemed that Octavian was being respectful of tradition, even if in his version these same terms took on additional or novel meanings.

One of the most interesting of these was the title of Augustus, bestowed upon Octavian by vote of the senate after his supposed abdication of power in 27 BC. Again, he had probably arranged behind the scenes for this to happen, but he could publicly claim that the senate had spontaneously granted him this title in gratitude for his actions.

The duality of the traditional term *augustus*—somehow projecting modesty while also singling out its object as nearly a divine being—is typical of the extraordinary facility that Octavian possessed for manipulating words and images to promote himself and his reign.

It has become a convention for historians, when describing the career of this man, to refer to him as Octavian during the first stage of his life, up to 27 BC, but then to switch to calling him Augustus once he had effectively become the sole ruler of the Roman world.

Octavian's inspired solution to the dilemma of what to call himself was to take no single name or title, but instead to conceal his power behind a host of them—none of which individually seemed that excessive, but each of which highlighted a different component of his power.

Augustus began to use the honorific *princeps civitatis*, which roughly translates as “first citizen”; the title “imperator,” emphasizing his role as a successful military leader; and the title “pater patriae,” meaning “father of the country.”

All of these terms became not only parts of his title but components of his actual name, and subsequent emperors would follow his lead and call themselves by the same constellation of terms.



The fourth and final component of his successful solution to the challenge of how to rule Rome as one man centered around his personal behavior. In this realm, he was clearly thinking of the animosity that Julius Caesar had provoked by his arrogant and autocratic manner, so Augustus made a great show of trying to demonstrate his modesty. Rather than living in a lavish palace, instead he inhabited a house of modest size. Likewise, he dressed in a simple toga like every other citizen, dined on ostentatiously simple foods, and treated senators with respect and courtesy instead of lording over them.

Content with possessing real power, he apparently did not feel the need for luxuriating in its superficial trappings. Augustus's calculatedly unpretentious behavior helped sustain the fiction that he was not, in fact, an absolute monarch—and it worked. Whereas Julius Caesar had been assassinated after only a few years, Augustus enjoyed a long reign of almost half a century, and ultimately died of natural causes.



Assessing Augustus's Success

One of the most interesting issues concerning Augustus is how to evaluate his establishment of the principate. Did Augustus, for all practical purposes, destroy the Roman Republic and its government? Or, as he claimed, did he simply restore it when it was in need of rejuvenation? Similarly, with his settlement of the Roman state, was he an innovator who created completely new institutions, or was he primarily a traditionalist who merely adapted and updated old forms for the current situation? These are questions that historians have argued about for centuries, and there may be no truly right or wrong answer to them.

Certainly at the time, many Romans seemed to go along with the idea that Augustus was a traditionalist who had restored and saved the republic during a time of crisis, and this was the official story that Augustus himself strongly advocated.

Augustus's autobiography—which was engraved on stone tablets that were erected outside his mausoleum—was called the *Res Gestae*, and it was a brilliant work of propaganda that perfectly captures the adroit way in which Augustus exploited language to promote his reign and his version of events.



For obvious reasons, no one at the time dared to openly contest Augustus's assertion that the republic still existed and had merely undergone a needed restoration under his direction. It would be two centuries—around AD 200, when Roman historian Cassius Dio composed a history of Rome that included Augustus's reign—before we have a surviving account of Augustus that openly dared to label him a king.

Foreign Policy under Augustus

In terms of Augustus's foreign policy, the rapid expansion of the empire's borders that had characterized the previous centuries largely stopped. In general, Augustus concentrated more on solidifying what Rome already had than on gaining new lands.

The civil wars had generated a huge number of legions, and one of Augustus's greatest initial challenges was what to do with these hordes of soldiers who were all looking to him to reward their service. He reduced the number of legions to 28 and discharged hundreds of thousands of veterans. Most of them were awarded grants of land and settled as farmers in a series of colonies that Augustus established all over the Mediterranean.

This transformed them from being a drain on the economy into productive citizens and also furthered the process of Romanizing the foreign territories that Rome had acquired. Rome now controlled a continuous ring of peaceful provinces circling all the way around the Mediterranean Sea. Augustus also revised the bloated rolls of the senate, reducing its membership by several hundred, down to about 600.

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Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*.

QUESTIONS

1. In the end, do you think Augustus should be regarded as a king, or did the Roman Republic still exist in some genuine fashion after the settlement of 27 BC?
2. What do you think are the most important factors that account for Augustus's success in establishing a stable one-man rule over Rome, particularly when so many others had failed when attempting to do the same thing?

Augustus had a long and successful reign. The political system that he devised would be emulated by subsequent Roman emperors for the rest of Roman history.

Augustus would become the paradigm of the good emperor against whom all later emperors, both those of Rome and those from other cultures, would be measured.

Augustus liked to view himself as a second founder of Rome after Romulus, and there is truth to this image, because he was indeed the father of the Roman Empire. For this alone, he is rightfully regarded as one of the most important figures in Roman history.



TIBERIUS AND CALIGULA

LECTURE 3

Augustus's reign was marked by many spectacular achievements, and he became the inspiration and model for subsequent leaders. However, there was one major flaw in his settlement of the empire—the issue of succession. Because there was no official position of emperor, there was nothing concrete to transfer to the next person. There was also the vexing problem of how to select the best-qualified person. For better or worse—and many times during the next century, it would be for the worse—Augustus settled on the principle of heredity: The next emperor would be the nearest male blood relative of the previous one.

The Problem of Succession

Augustus's choice of heredity as the mechanism for succession was somewhat curious in that he actually had no close male relatives. He had no sons from any of his three marriages, nor did he have any brothers. What he had to work with were three women: his sister, Octavia; his daughter, Julia; and his third wife, Livia.

Augustus looked first to his sister Octavia, who had a very promising teenage son named Marcellus. To solidify Marcellus as his heir, Augustus forced his 14-year-old daughter Julia to marry Marcellus in 25 BC. Augustus then began grooming Marcellus to take over, appointing him to a number of government posts so that he would gain experience and respect as a leader. Marcellus was bright and popular, but two years later, he caught an illness and unexpectedly died when he was just 19 years old.

Augustus next focused his attention on his loyal friend and general, Agrippa, who had played such a key role in Augustus's rise to power and who had effectively been serving as his second-in-command. Poor 18-year-old Julia was compelled to marry 43-year-old Agrippa. This made Agrippa Augustus's heir. Agrippa was highly competent, extremely experienced, and widely respected, so everything once again seemed fine—until Agrippa unexpectedly died in 12 BC.

All was not lost, however, because the union of Agrippa and Julia had produced two sons: Gaius and Lucius. Augustus was very fond of these grandsons and pushed the senate to grant them extraordinary honors.

To make the succession even clearer, Augustus adopted Gaius and Lucius as his sons. Despite their privileged upbringing, both boys seemed stable and promising. But in AD 2, Lucius fell ill and died at the age of 19. Just 18 months later, his brother, Gaius, was wounded in a skirmish in Armenia and died in AD 4 at the age of 23 years old.

All of Augustus's attempts to find an heir so far had focused on his family, the Julian family. But now he had simply run out of close male Julians. The only remaining male even remotely connected to Augustus was his wife Livia's son from a previous marriage: Tiberius Claudius Nero. After the death of Agrippa, Augustus had forced Tiberius to divorce a wife that he loved in order to marry the widowed Julia. Augustus had never liked Tiberius very much, but Augustus now had little choice but to adopt Tiberius as his son and promote him as heir to the throne.

By marrying Julia, Tiberius became at the same time Augustus's son by adoption, stepson by marriage, and son-in-law by marriage. By this convoluted path, Augustus ultimately ended up promoting a member of the Claudian family, rather than the Julian one, as his heir.

Throughout all of this, Augustus had steadfastly persisted in basing the succession on the principle of heredity and thus set the precedent for how future emperors would be chosen: They would be the nearest male blood relative, characteristic of a monarchy.

Emperor Tiberius

Augustus surprised everybody by living a very long time. He finally died in AD 14 of natural causes at the age of 77. At the time of Augustus's demise, Tiberius was already 54 years old.

Supposedly among Augustus's final words was a popular parting line used by actors in the theater: "If I have played my role well, then kindly clap your hands and dismiss me from the stage with applause."



The moment of Augustus's death was perhaps the best opportunity to restore the Roman Republic. If the senate were ever going to reassert itself, it would have to be now.

However, Augustus had ruled so long that by the time he died, there was no one left alive who could remember the old republic. The sheer length of Augustus's reign is one of the main reasons why the system that he set up took hold so strongly and became the model for the future.

Though soldiers were compelled to swear an oath of loyalty to the new emperor, various resentments had been building in the army. With his dour personality, Tiberius was ill-suited to win over the troops, so he sent his brother's charismatic son, Germanicus, to soothe the legions—and he did, calming the revolt.

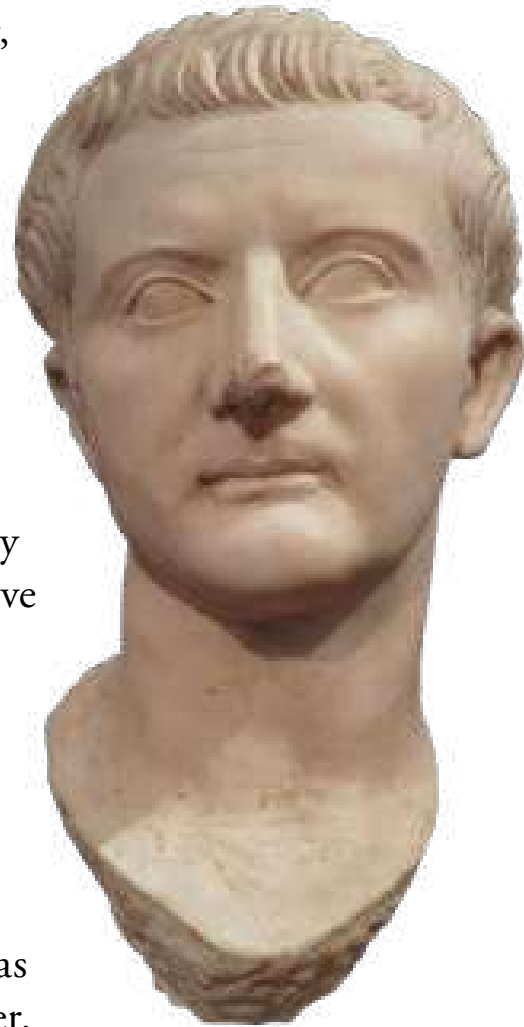
Considering his relatively advanced age, Tiberius had to quickly pick a successor, and Germanicus would have made a logical, popular, and reasonably skilled heir. Unfortunately, Germanicus fell ill and died in AD 19.

Tiberius did have a son, Drusus. Although not as popular as Germanicus had been, Drusus was an experienced leader and now became the heir apparent.

Meanwhile, back at Rome, it had always been technically forbidden to have troops in Italy, but under the emperors, a new group called the Praetorian Guard was established. This was a contingent of elite soldiers stationed in the city of Rome who were supposed to serve as the emperor's bodyguard—but far more often ended up assassinating him.

Already under Tiberius, the prefect, or commander, of the Praetorian Guard, named Sejanus, began to exceed his jurisdiction and assume control over much of the government. The very ambitious Sejanus was maneuvering to position himself as a potential heir to the emperor. This goal became attainable when, in AD 23, Drusus suddenly fell ill and died when he was only 36 years old.

The conniving Sejanus began an affair with Drusus's widow and sought permission from Tiberius to marry her—a move that would have made him a blood relative to Tiberius and thus a legitimate candidate for the throne. Tiberius denied this request but continued to allow Sejanus to exercise considerable power so that Sejanus often effectively ruled on Tiberius's behalf. In AD 26, Tiberius left Rome for good and retreated to his pleasure villa located on the island of Capri. With Tiberius in semiretirement, Sejanus was left in charge at Rome, and began to abuse his power.



If you visit Capri today, there is a trail that you can hike along and eventually reach the ruins of Tiberius's villa, where you can stroll along the same colonnaded paths that Tiberius and other famous Romans did.



Tiberius was a tight-fisted, unpopular emperor. Although his policies did not earn him the favor of the people, the empire was nonetheless run fairly efficiently under his rule, and his miserliness had the positive result that, by the time Tiberius died, the treasury had a surplus of several billion sesterces.

Although Sejanus was working hard to set himself up to succeed Tiberius, Germanicus's widow, Agrippina, was actively campaigning to promote her son by the popular deceased general as Tiberius's heir. This was a boy named Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus, widely known as Caligula.

He had acquired this name as a toddler in his father's army camp in Germany when the soldiers had given him a miniature pair of army boots. The boots worn by Roman soldiers were called "*caligae*," so the nickname Caligula can be roughly translated as "little boots," or "bootikins."



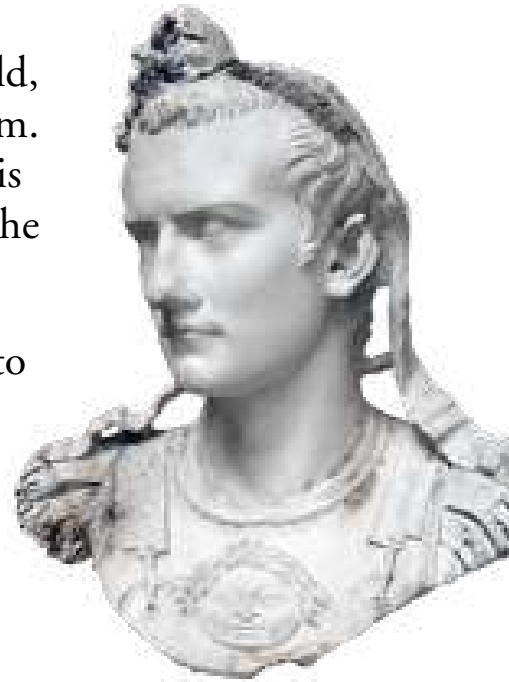
The rivalry between Sejanus and Agrippina escalated, eventually reaching a crisis point when Sejanus became impatient and openly plotted to harm Agrippina and Caligula. Tiberius could not tolerate such a direct threat against members of his family, with the result that Sejanus was abruptly denounced and executed. He was replaced as prefect of the Praetorian Guard by a man named Macro.

During the last years of his life, Tiberius stayed in seclusion on Capri. The candidates to succeed him were Caligula and Gemellus, a son of Drusus. Both were still young, and they were appointed as coheirs. In AD 37, Tiberius finally died at the age of 77. Of the two rival heirs, Caligula appears to have been the more ambitious, and he had secured the backing of Macro. With Macro's help, Caligula pushed aside the younger Gemellus and took power.

The Troubled Reign of Caligula

At the time of his accession, Caligula was 25 years old, and at first, he was greeted with enormous enthusiasm. His father Germanicus had been very popular, and this affection carried over to Caligula, who charmed the senate, people, and army with his initial behavior.

Caligula distributed huge amounts of cash as gifts to the people of Rome and to the soldiers. He staged extravagant beast hunts, chariot races, and spectacles for the amusement of the inhabitants of the city. The senate and upper-class Romans were pleased by his cutting of taxes on the sale of slaves and by his demeanor toward them, which was respectful and conciliatory.



Late in AD 37, Caligula fell ill with some sort of brain fever, and afterward his behavior changed. Perhaps this was an effect of the illness, or perhaps once he felt securely in charge, his true nature began to assert itself. Regardless of the reason, he became increasingly erratic and cruel. He had Macro executed and forced Gemellus to commit suicide. There were many rumors of Caligula's depravity, including that he supposedly committed incest with all three of his sisters.

To pay for his extravagance, Caligula ended up raising some taxes, imposing new ones, and confiscating the property of citizens that he had murdered for flimsy reasons. In a short time, his extravagances squandered the enormous treasury surplus that had been built up by Tiberius and plunged the empire into debt.

Many rulers throughout history have displayed a tendency toward cruelty and self-aggrandizing behavior. Scholars still debate whether Caligula was merely a particularly extreme example of this phenomenon or if he was actually mentally unbalanced in a clinical sense.

One controversial aspect of Caligula's behavior often raised as evidence of his insanity was his apparent desire to be worshipped as a god. There is some ambiguity in the surviving sources regarding this issue, but some sources claimed that he may have truly believed that he was some sort of divinity. He allegedly dressed up as various gods, spoke to them as equals, and had temples to himself built.

One of the most notorious stories often linked to Caligula's insanity concerns his enthusiasm for chariot racing. He was particularly enamored of one horse, Incitatus, whose name might be translated as "Speedy." At Caligula's orders, a special stable of marble and ivory was built for Incitatus, and on the day before races, military units were posted around the neighborhood to ensure that no one made any noise so that "Speedy" might get a good night's sleep. Allegedly, Caligula planned to have his beloved Incitatus appointed to the post of consul, the highest government office.

After less than four years of this sort of behavior, many were fed up with Caligula, and a conspiracy formed to assassinate him. Among its leaders were a number of officers of the Praetorian Guard, who stabbed Caligula 30 times with their swords on January 24, AD 41.

READINGS

Barrett, *Caligula and the Corruption of Power*.
Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*.

QUESTIONS

1. Rather than basing the succession on heredity, how do you think the Romans should have selected the next emperor? Do you think your proposed method could realistically have been implemented?
2. If you were to write a job description for the position of Roman emperor, what would you put on it? How well did Tiberius and Caligula fulfill your set of job requirements?

Now that Rome had rid itself of one bad and possibly crazy emperor, who would take his place?



CLAUDIUS AND NERO

LECTURE 4

The events that followed the murder of the probably-mad emperor Caligula laid bare the reality of where true power now lay in the Roman Empire. Caligula was brutally hacked to death by his own Praetorian Guardsmen, a group who were notionally charged with protecting the emperor's life. Then, while different factions of the senate ineffectually squabbled over what to do next, the Praetorian Guard took matters into their own hands by acclaiming a new emperor of their choosing: Claudius, the 51-year-old uncle of Caligula and a brother of the popular general Germanicus.

Claudius, the Unlikeliest Emperor

Most Romans, including the members of his own family, had always viewed Claudius with contempt because he had been born with a variety of disabilities. Although he may have suffered from cerebral palsy as well as a number of physical disabilities, which made him an object of cruel mirth and scorn, he harbored a sharp mind.

Under Augustus and Tiberius, Claudius's embarrassed family had largely kept him out of the limelight, and he seems to have survived the carnage of Caligula's reign by deliberately playing up his weaknesses and adopting something of the persona of a court fool.

Claudius certainly seems to have tried his best to be a good emperor, but he had not been given the opportunity to gain any practical experience in leadership and government. Though outwardly respectful toward the senate and other Roman elites, he had endured much ridicule at their hands and was therefore wary of them.

To fill the need for aid in governing, he turned instead to the previously anonymous staffers who made up the imperial bureaucracy, many of whom were former slaves. Several of these freedmen, such as Claudius's secretary, Narcissus, ended up wielding enormous power and influence in Claudius's administration. On the whole, these men were highly efficient, but they had a tendency to exploit Claudius's trust in them in order to enrich themselves.

Nevertheless, Claudius set in motion a number of significant initiatives. He established some important precedents by insisting upon the admission of Romanized provincial aristocrats into the senate: a smart strategy that channeled the talents of people in regions conquered by Rome into working for the benefit of the empire rather than seeking to undermine it.

In foreign affairs, he was vigorous, annexing several new areas and reorganizing some of the existing provinces. His most dramatic action was to finally launch a serious invasion of Britain, which Julius Caesar and Caligula had both made abortive forays against but with no lasting results. Claudius dispatched a sizable Roman army that successfully defeated the southern British kingdoms. Over the next half century, the Romans would gradually expand farther northward in Britain, converting most of it into another Roman province.



Even as emperor, Claudius continued his historical and literary studies and wrote several lengthy works, among them an 8-volume history of Carthage, a 20-volume Etruscan history, and an ambitious narrative of Roman history. He was fluent in Greek, produced an 8-volume autobiography, and even devised three new letters that he hoped would be added to the Latin alphabet.



Claudius was conscientious when it came to public works, particularly those that had a practical focus. He constructed a major new aqueduct to ensure an adequate provision of water for Rome and gave attention to the food supply system of the capital city.

Unlike Tiberius, Claudius took great pleasure in attending public games and entertainments. He also held sumptuous banquets and distributed largesse in the form of both cash and gifts to the people.

Claudius's third wife gave birth to his daughter, Octavia, and a son, Britannicus, whom Claudius designated as his heir. Claudius's fourth wife was his own niece, Caligula's sister, Agrippina the Younger, who had a son from a previous marriage named Nero. Nero was several years older than Britannicus, and Agrippina the Younger insisted that Nero be groomed as a possible successor in the same manner as Britannicus. Claudius agreed, and Nero was adopted as his own son. At Agrippina's urging, Nero moved ahead of Britannicus and became the favored heir by being married to Claudius's biological daughter Octavia, Nero's own stepsister by marriage, and in AD 54, Agrippina poisoned Claudius.

Nero, Another Crazy Emperor

Nero was only 16 when he became emperor, and initially he appears to have been very much under the control of three adult figures: his domineering mother, Agrippina the Younger; his personal tutor, the famous Stoic philosopher Seneca; and one of the prefects of the Praetorian Guard, Burrus, who was an able administrator.

For roughly the first five years of his reign, this triumvirate ruled the empire in a somewhat efficient manner on Nero's behalf, while he acted as the figurehead and spent most of his time indulging his passions for music, theater, and entertainments. As Nero grew older, however, he began to chafe under his mother's heavy-handed control and to resent it when she disapproved of, or actively curbed, his pleasures. Eventually, in AD 59, he had her executed on trumped-up conspiracy charges.

A few years later, Burrus died (or, according to some sources, was poisoned), and Seneca was pushed to the side and eventually compelled to commit suicide. Nero was then free to embark on a career of terror, debauchery, and self-indulgence. Not only did he have various senators, equestrians, and citizens killed, but he also murdered almost every member of his family, including his stepbrother Britannicus and his stepsister/wife Octavia.

The empire endured several crises during Nero's reign. In Judea, there was a dangerous insurrection when the Jews, incensed by the desecration of their temple and other insults, rose up against Rome. The revolt spread, affecting the entire province. Nero was forced to dispatch an experienced general named Vespasian to the east to deal with the rebellion. Vespasian methodically suppressed the Jewish fighters, eventually undertaking a siege of the city of Jerusalem itself.





On July 18, AD 64, a fire broke out near the chariot racing arena, the Circus Maximus, that eventually engulfed much of the city and burned for nine days. Known as the Great Fire, it destroyed, either partially or completely, 10 out of Rome's 14 districts and transformed huge swaths of the city center into smoking rubble.

Although Nero was active in efforts to fight the fire and offered assistance to those affected by it, he could not resist taking advantage of the disaster to gratify his ego as well. The fire had cleared out one of the central areas of the city between the Palatine and Esquiline Hills, and Nero chose this high-profile spot to erect a lavish new pleasure palace for himself. This complex, known as the Domus Aurea, or the Golden House, was an astonishing conglomeration of over-the-top features.

The Golden House elicited considerable resentment due to its extravagance, and later emperors soon abandoned and built over it, burying its remains under other structures. The ruins of the Golden House still exist today beneath the streets of Rome.

Nero's erratic behavior continued. In the late 60s AD, he decided that he wanted to travel to Greece to compete in the great Panhellenic festivals, such as the Olympics. Competing in various categories as an actor, a musician, and a charioteer, Nero happily collected no fewer than 1,808 prizes during his grand artistic tour of Greece. It does not seem to have dimmed his enthusiasm that many of these were awarded even before he actually performed.

Nero wanted to have the city of Rome renamed "Neropolis."

Nero's triumphant trip was cut short, however, by news that several of his own governors and generals, at last fed up with his excesses, had raised revolts against him in the provinces. Returning to Italy, Nero found his support rapidly eroding, with the senate even declaring him a public enemy. In June of AD 68, as his foes closed in on him, Nero committed suicide.

The Year of the Four Emperors

Nero's death sparked a true crisis for Rome. By this point, the institution of the principate was well established and Rome had become accustomed to the rule of emperors. There would be no return to the days of the Roman Republic.

However, it had also been firmly established that the emperors were chosen on the basis of heredity. Thus far, all emperors had been drawn from the extended Julio-Claudian family, and thus the first set of emperors—encompassing Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero—are today commonly referred to as the Julio-Claudians. Nero's depredations, however, had killed off nearly all his close relatives, so there were no obvious available Julio-Claudians to take his place.

Nero was gone, but who now would, or should, take his place? This was the crisis that Rome faced in AD 68.

Perhaps inevitably, the way that the next ruler was determined was through civil war. Over the ensuing 18 chaotic months, Rome would run through no fewer than four different emperors as an assortment of ambitious generals fought it out to see who would claim the throne.

The process began with the governor of one of the Gallic provinces named Vindex, who revolted against Nero and gained the support of several other governors and their armies, including Galba in Spain and Otho in Lusitania. Vindex's army was defeated by another governor still loyal to Nero, and Vindex killed himself. Meanwhile, though, his colleague Galba had been sending enormous bribes to the soldiers of the Praetorian Guard as well as other military units in Italy, with the result that they proclaimed Galba emperor. With the troops both at Rome and in the provinces on his side, Galba thus officially succeeded Nero as the next emperor.



Galba only lasted a few months, however, because he promptly lost the support of the troops when he refused to pay them what he had promised. Galba also managed to offend most other segments of the Roman populace. Sensing which way the wind was blowing, Galba's

lieutenant, Otho, secretly went to the Praetorians and promised them huge sums of money in return for making him emperor. The ever-fickle Praetorian Guard immediately abandoned their allegiance to Galba, murdered him, and acclaimed Otho as the new emperor.

One of the largest concentrations of soldiers was stationed along the German frontier, and one of the Roman commanders there, named Vitellius, harbored imperial ambitions.



He marched his army down into Italy and fought two gigantic battles against Otho's forces. Vitellius's army prevailed in these encounters, and the defeated Otho committed suicide. Rome had Vitellius as its third emperor in less than a year.



The armies of Gaul, Spain, and Germany had created emperors; now it was time for the eastern troops to get in on the act. The legions of Egypt, Syria, and Judea proclaimed Vespasian, the general who had been successful at quelling the Jewish revolt, as their choice for emperor. Vespasian turned his attention to overthrowing Vitellius, cutting off the supply of Egyptian grain to Rome and gaining the support of other provincial legions. Vitellius's supporters began to fade away and his army was defeated by Vespasian's men. In the last days of that eventful year of AD 69, a dejected Vitellius was slain by soldiers, and Rome had acquired its fourth emperor, Vespasian.



READINGS

Champlin, *Nero*.

Griffith, *Nero*.

Levick, *Claudius*.

Wellesley, *The Year of the Four Emperors*.

QUESTIONS

1. One argument often put forward to explain why emperors like Caligula and Nero seemed to go insane is that they assumed power at a young age and that their youth made them especially susceptible to being corrupted by power. Do you agree with this interpretation? Why or why not?
2. Claudius had never been considered a viable candidate for emperor by his family, yet he seems to have been fairly successful. What were his strengths and weaknesses as a ruler? Do you think he was a good emperor overall?

After the chaos of 68 and 69, Vespasian would bring stability and order, and most importantly, he would manage to stay alive and rule for nearly 10 more years. In many ways, he can be considered the second founder of the Roman principate after Augustus. Vespasian was also the founder of the second family of emperors, the Flavians.



THE FLAVIAN EMPERORS AND ROMAN BATH CULTURE

LECTURE 5

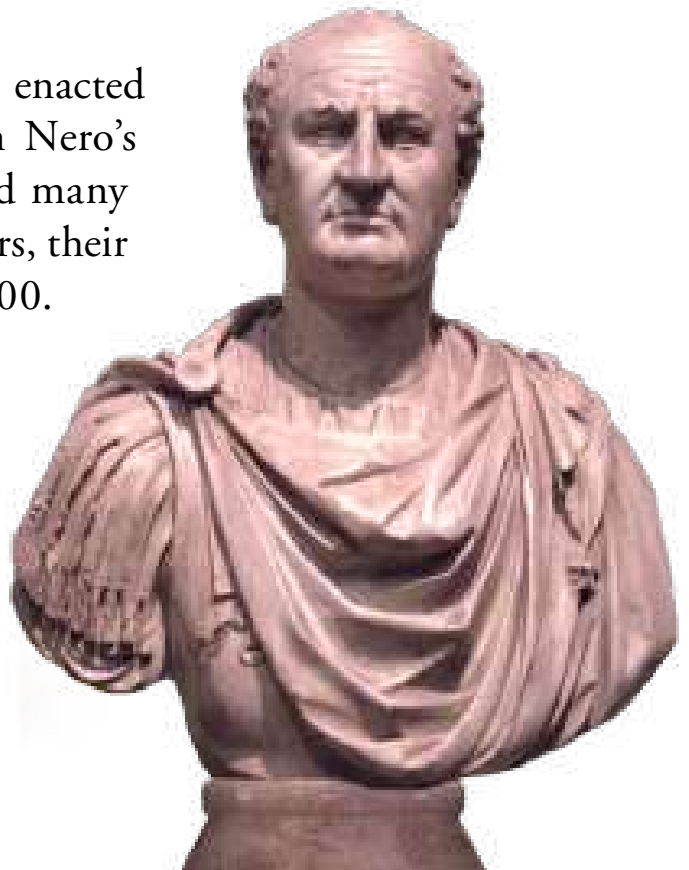
The so-called year of the four emperors had witnessed a destructive cycle of civil wars as provincial governors from every corner of the empire had abandoned their posts and marched on Rome with their armies to battle one another for supremacy. When the bloodbath ended and the dust settled, the one left standing was Vespasian, and his accession in the final days of AD 69 brought welcome stability to the Roman Empire. Vespasian and his sons, collectively known as the Flavian emperors after their family name, would rule for the next 27 years. At the time of his accession, Rome's new emperor was 60 years old and already had a long and successful record as a general and administrator. Vespasian was exactly what the empire needed to get things back on track at this moment of crisis.

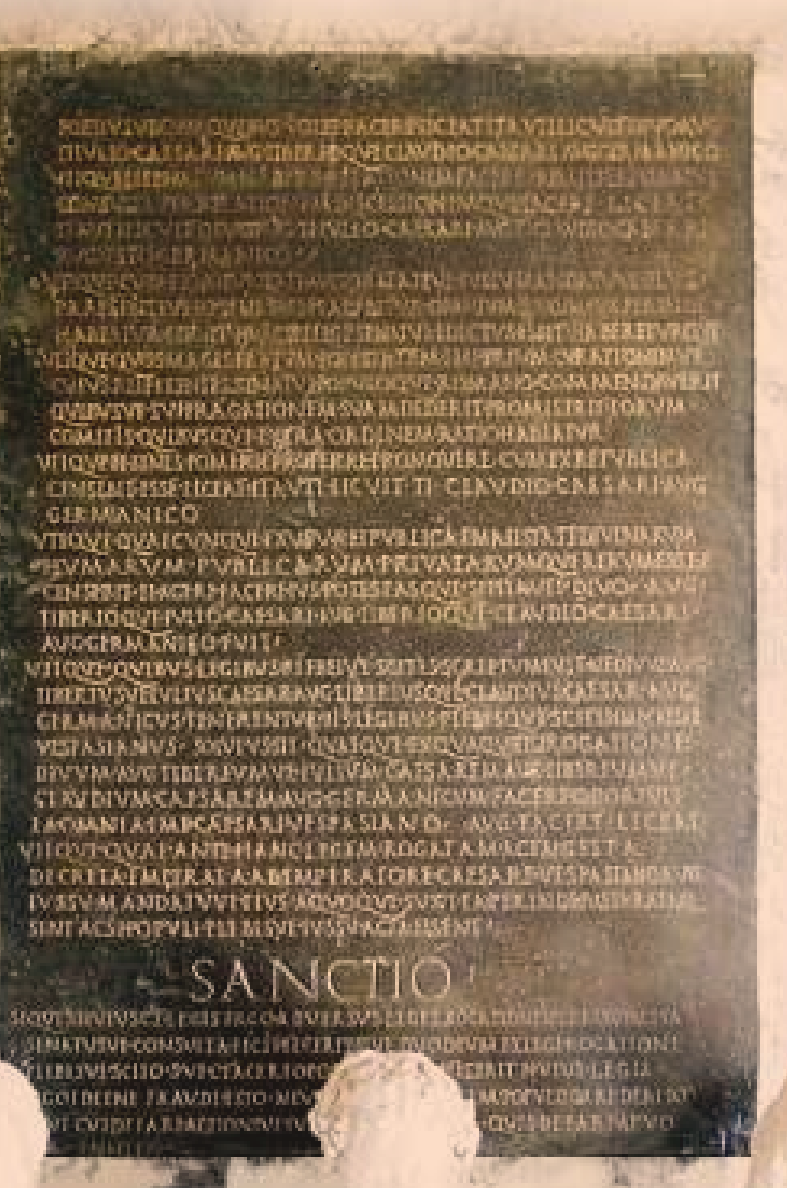
Vespasian Brings Order

Vespasian was a good administrator and enacted a number of useful measures. Between Nero's having murdered numerous senators and many others having fallen in the recent civil wars, their number had dropped to only about 200.

To bring its rolls up to a more normal strength, Vespasian added at least 400 new members, selecting only men of experience and talent.

Just as they had devastated the membership of the senate, Nero and the civil wars had also depleted the state treasury and thrown the empire into debt. He tackled the shaky finances of the empire with the same methodical pragmatism he showed in other areas, conducting a careful empire-wide census that included the surveying of land and property. This census then served as a logical basis upon which to calculate and impose taxes. He instated some new carefully chosen taxes in order to raise funds. His measures were successful and restored financial stability.





Vespasian's accession marked a more open and formal recognition of the emperor's position and authority. This can be seen in a remarkable bronze tablet—known as the *Lex de Imperio Vespasiani*, or the “Law Concerning the Imperium of Vespasian”—that was found at Rome, which preserves a list of the formal powers that were bestowed upon the new emperor by the senate and people of Rome.

You can view this bronze tablet on display in the Capitoline Museum in Rome.

Although he acquired a reputation for being stingy, he was in fact willing to spend large sums on projects that he thought were worthwhile and would benefit the people. He invested in major public works projects in Rome, ordering the construction of a replacement for the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline, which had been burned down during the civil wars; a new Temple of Peace to celebrate the end of those wars; and a vast new amphitheater in which to stage public spectacles.

The official name of this last structure was the Flavian Amphitheater, but it is more commonly known today as the Colosseum. The location of the Flavian Amphitheater—partially on the site of Nero's Golden House—was a deliberately propagandistic gesture. Using this central location to erect a building whose purpose was for the enjoyment of the entire Roman people, rather than for just the private pleasure of the emperor, was a strong symbolic statement.



The nickname "Colosseum" is derived from the fact that the colossal golden statue of Nero, which had been converted into an image of the sun god, stood just outside the new amphitheater.

Trouble with the Jews

Vespasian's reign was not trouble-free, however. One ongoing challenge was the rebellion of the Jews.

Recall that Vespasian had been the general in charge of subduing this revolt. In AD 69, when the eastern armies had acclaimed him as emperor, he had naturally been forced to leave Judea in order to take control in Rome, but the Jewish war had not yet been concluded and the siege of Jerusalem had just begun. When he departed, Vespasian appointed his eldest son, Titus, to take command of the Roman forces and to complete the campaign against the Jews.

Like his father, Titus was an excellent general, but the Jews were a skilled foe, so the siege of Jerusalem was a long one, and when the city finally did fall to the Roman legions, the slaughter was considerable.

In AD 70, the temple in Jerusalem was looted and destroyed, and the surviving Jews were enslaved. Even this did not end the war, however, as pockets of determined Jewish Zealots continued to fight and had to be subdued one by one.



We know about the Jewish revolt in considerable detail because one of the Jewish leaders, named Josephus, was captured by Vespasian early in the conflict. Taken back to Rome as Vespasian's slave, Josephus was freed by him, becoming a Roman citizen and a friend of the emperor.

Josephus then wrote two books, one recounting the course of the Jewish war and the other describing Jewish history generally.



After defeating the Jews, Titus joined his father in Rome and celebrated a triumph. In commemoration of the conquest of Judea, a victory arch was later erected in Rome near the Flavian Amphitheater. The Arch of Titus is one of the few Roman arches that still survives today.

Titus Takes Over and Faces Challenges

After ruling for 10 years, Vespasian fell ill with a fever and died in AD 79. Power passed seamlessly to Vespasian's son Titus, who was well liked and had already amply proven his own competence as both a general and an administrator.

It was under Titus that the Flavian Amphitheater was officially opened in AD 80 in a spectacular fashion, with 100 continuous days of games and entertainments. Unveiled along with the amphitheater and also intended for the enjoyment of the people was a new public bath complex, the Baths of Titus, featuring an ornate monumental marble staircase connecting it directly with the plaza of the amphitheater.



Titus continued the policies of his father and set an even more conciliatory and generous tone, allowing exiled philosophers to return to Rome, outlawing treason trials, and cracking down on unscrupulous informers. Although he had a slight reputation for wildness in his youth, Titus was sober and popular as emperor, and Rome seemed set to enjoy a long stretch of prosperity.

Unfortunately, a series of dramatic disasters soon struck. A deadly plague ravaged the countryside near Rome, and the most serious fire since the Great Fire of 64 broke out in the city of Rome. These were not the worst natural disasters of his reign, however, because on August 24, AD 79, Mount Vesuvius violently erupted, spewing ash and pyroclastic flows that devastated the area and buried the cities of Pompeii, Herculaneum, Oplontis, and Stabiae.

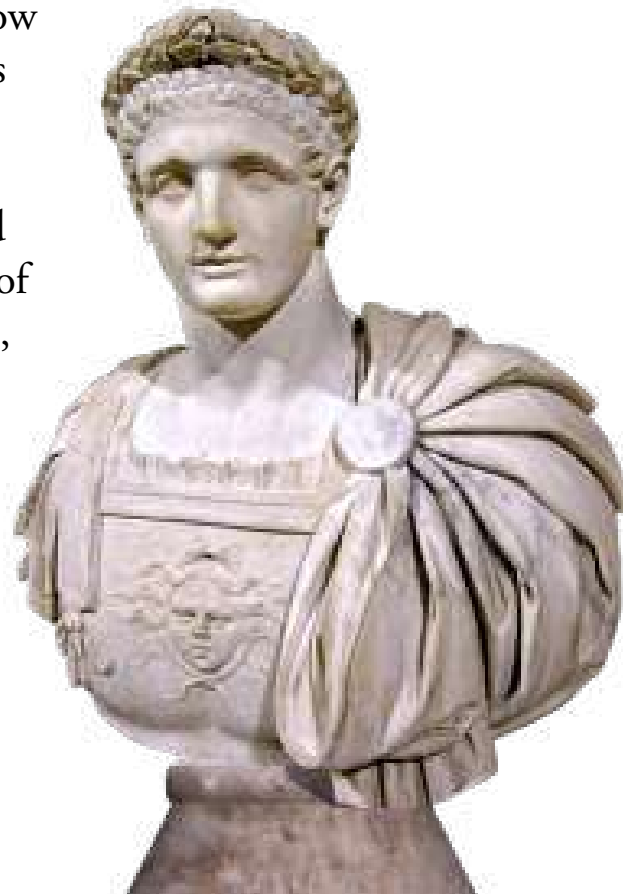
Titus was active in providing relief for these disasters, but after ruling only 26 months, he fell ill and died prematurely.

An eyewitness description of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius survived the disaster. It was written by the 18-year-old Pliny the Younger, who said that “the cloud resembled a pine tree—it rose to a great height and then extended out in several branches. ... The cloud was white in some places, but dark and spotted in others, as if it had carried up dirt or cinders.”



Things Go Downhill with Domitian

Vespasian had two sons—Titus, the elder, and Domitian, the younger—and it now fell to Domitian to take his brother's place as emperor. Domitian had not been as carefully groomed by his father to be a leader as Titus had been, and Domitian had not held the same range of military and civil positions. Nevertheless, Domitian had received a good education and had a reasonable amount of experience, so it was hoped that he would continue the good precedent established by his father and brother.



Unfortunately for Rome, this hope was misplaced. As emperor, Domitian proved to be more like Caligula or Nero than like his fellow Flavians. Domitian disrespected and terrorized the senate, indulged in lavish and self-aggrandizing spectacles; spent enormous amounts of money building himself a grandiose new palace complex atop the Palatine Hill, and engaged in a variety of eccentric behaviors. Like Nero, he seemed to believe in his own divinity and preferred to be addressed as *Dominus et Deus*, or “Lord and God.”

While its leader may have been unbalanced, the bureaucracy set up by Vespasian continued to function reasonably efficiently, so the empire kept running without too much turmoil. Domitian ruled for 15 years. As time went on, he grew increasingly paranoid and had many senators put to death on suspicion of plotting against him. This became a self-fulfilling prophecy, because fear for their lives likely prompted his potential victims to form actual conspiracies. Eventually, in AD 96, one of these was successful, and he was assassinated in his own bedroom by a group of palace servants.

A Look at Roman Bath Culture

A central and distinctive component of Roman culture was their enthusiasm for bathing and the lengths to which Roman emperors would go to provide extravagant bathing facilities for the people of Rome. By the early empire, bathing had become an important social ritual for the Romans that was closely associated with the entire concept of what it meant to be Roman. Wherever the Romans went, they constructed bath complexes, so these structures have been found even in outposts on the fringes of the Roman Empire.

When a Roman visited a public bath, much more was involved than simply bathing. Baths were ancient social centers where people might go to spend an entire day. They were spaces for exercise, relaxation, education, grooming, socializing, eating, conducting business, showing off to your peers, and even engaging in sexual activity. Bath complexes included facilities for all of these activities as well as simply for bathing.

An important aspect of baths was that the large public ones either were free or charged only token admission fees. Thus, such amenities were accessible to all levels of Roman society and, unlike public entertainments, baths were available every day, not just on special occasions.

The gigantic public baths constructed by the emperors were known as *thermae*, while the numerous smaller public or private baths were called *balnea*. The earliest *thermae* were the Baths of Agrippa, followed by the Baths of Nero, and then the one inaugurated by Titus along with the Flavian Amphitheater.

Over the next several hundred years, the emperors Trajan, Caracalla, Diocletian, and Constantine would all construct additional major public baths for the city's populace. By the 4th century AD, the city of Rome would boast 11 great *thermae* and 856 smaller *balnea*.

Many of these *balnea* likely served as neighborhood social centers, where a relatively small group of regular clientele would gather and socialize with their acquaintances. The grand public *thermae*, on the other hand, although more anonymous, offered a greater range of activities and services. These *thermae* were also attractive simply due to the magnificence of their construction.



The best preserved of the grand imperial thermae at Rome was also one of the largest—the Thermae Antonianae, or, as it is popularly known, the Baths of Caracalla, built in the 3rd century AD. Its ground floor covered an area of more than 30 acres, and it could probably accommodate around 1,600 bathers at one time.

In the modern era, the vast ruins are sometimes used to stage concerts and operas.

All Roman baths included at least three basic types of rooms for bathing: the tepidarium, which contained a pool of warm water; the caldarium, which featured a pool or tub of hot water; and the frigidarium, with a pool of cold water. Baths were equipped with furnaces that heated water, which was then directed to the appropriate pools.

Romans bathed in the nude, and either women had separate bath facilities, or in some cases, there were designated times of day when men were allowed in and when women were allowed in. There are some references, however, that indicate that at least at times, mixed bathing was permitted. Not all Romans approved of baths, and some saw them as exerting a degenerative effect on morality. Baths were sometimes seen as sites of overindulgence in luxury, food, or sex.



READINGS

Fagan, *Bathing in Public in the Roman World*.

Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*.

Levick, *Vespasian*.

QUESTIONS

1. As a group, what are the main accomplishments and failures of the Flavian family of emperors?
2. Roman bathing complexes fulfilled many different functions in their society. Do you find Roman bath culture to be an appealing aspect of Roman civilization and one that you can empathize with? Or does it seem strange and an example of the otherness of Roman civilization?

Baths were one of the most impressive, distinctive, and pleasant-sounding aspects of Roman civilization. Appealingly, they could also be shared by Romans of all economic and social classes. As such, they are a fitting lead-in to the next lecture, which describes the golden age of Roman civilization during the 2nd century AD.



THE FIVE GOOD EMPERORS

LECTURE 6

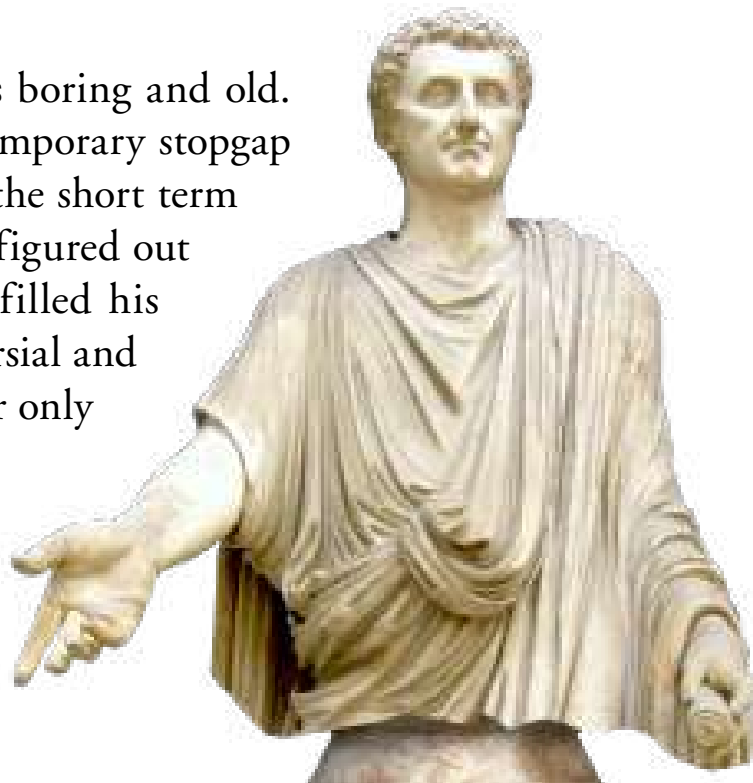
In AD 96, after the death of the emperor Domitian, the Roman Empire was forced to confront a fundamental defect in the structure of the principate: the hereditary method of selecting future emperors, established by the first emperor, Augustus. This method had burdened the empire with a disproportionate number of leaders—such as Caligula, Nero, and Domitian—who were despotic, insane, or both. Roman culture was highly conservative and resistant to change, but the havoc caused by these rulers had been so extreme that even the Romans were ready to contemplate adjusting their ideas about picking emperors.

The Golden Age of Rome

The end of the Julio-Claudian family's reign as emperors in AD 68 had resulted in terrible violence and civil war, and the demise of the Flavian dynasty in AD 96 might have produced a similar tragedy, but this calamity was averted by the senate quickly nominating a man named Nerva to be the next emperor.

Nerva's chief virtues were that he was boring and old. He was clearly chosen as a safe and temporary stopgap measure to fill the leadership void in the short term and thus buy time while the Romans figured out what to do next. Nerva perfectly fulfilled his intended role, doing nothing controversial and then expiring from natural causes after only 16 months.

The most important thing Nerva did during his brief reign was to carefully consider who might make the best successor. His choice fell on a dynamic up-and-coming Roman aristocrat named Trajan, who had already amassed a long and successful record of military and civil service. However, the Romans could not bring themselves to entirely break with the heredity tradition, so Nerva officially adopted Trajan as his son, despite the fact that Trajan was already 44 years old.



This, then, was to be the new model for how to choose emperors: Rather than just picking his son, the current emperor would instead select the best-qualified person and then adopt that person as his son. For roughly the next century, each of the emperors would follow this template, and each one turned out to be a sensible and competent ruler.

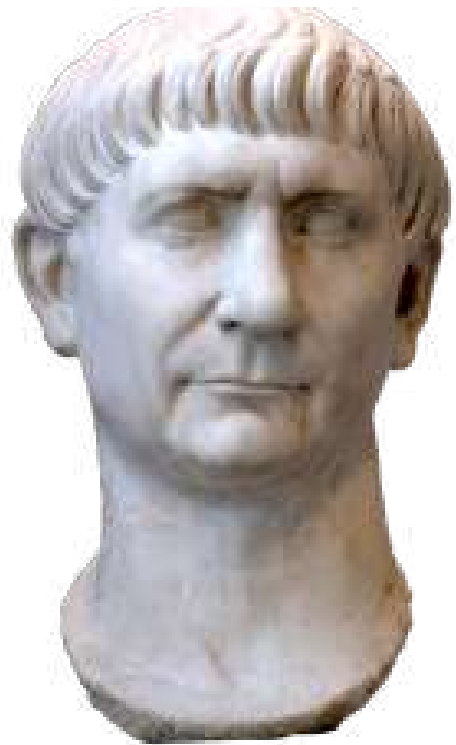
Accordingly, this group—beginning with Nerva in AD 96 and running until the death of Marcus Aurelius in AD 180—has become collectively known as the five good emperors, and the 2nd century AD, when they ruled, is widely regarded as marking the high point of Roman civilization. In this period, the empire reached its greatest geographical extent; there was peace, security, and relative prosperity for most of its inhabitants; and the emperors were mostly wise and just.

During this time, Rome presided over about 50 provinces, and the empire sprawled across three continents and included 50 million inhabitants. The famous historian Edward Gibbon considered this time a true golden age and even called this era “the happiest time in all of history.”

Trajan, the Ideal Princeps

Trajan was a popular and hard-working emperor who modeled his behavior toward the senate and people on that of Augustus. Thus, he was polite and deferential to the senate and provided entertainment and public works for the people.

Trajan acquired the reputation of being nearly an ideal emperor and earned the title *optimus princeps*, meaning “the best princeps.” In later years, the senate would praise emperors that they regarded as good ones by using Trajan as a yardstick.



Trajan had a strong military background, and he expanded the boundaries of the empire in several directions. He led major campaigns in person, and the most famous of these was an expedition to conquer the region of Dacia, which is the section of eastern Europe enclosed within the great southward-sweeping arc of the Danube River, roughly equivalent today to the country of Romania. When the Dacian wars ended in AD 106, the kingdom of Dacia was annexed and turned into a Roman province.



Other regions added to the empire were the province of Arabia, in the southeastern corner of the Mediterranean, as well as parts of Mesopotamia and Armenia. These latter two brought Rome into conflict with the powerful eastern empire of Parthia, which was centered in modern Iraq.

In AD 113, Trajan led a large Roman army into Parthia. The invasion met with initial success, capturing the Parthian capital of Ctesiphon, but the campaign then bogged down. Meanwhile, a number of revolts had erupted in the eastern provinces, including another Jewish one, and Trajan had to divert attention to quelling these. Perhaps worn out by all these exertions, the now 63-year-old Trajan fell ill and died in AD 117.



Trajan's Forum, a vast complex located in the heart of the city, was immediately north of the old Roman Forum and dwarfed it in both size and splendor.

The best-known surviving feature of the complex is a towering 100-foot-high column composed of 17 drums of pristine white Luna marble that were entirely covered with a spiral of carved reliefs depicting the course of the Dacian campaign from beginning to end. This spiral frieze has 155 panels with more than 2,600 intricately carved figures and survives to this day.

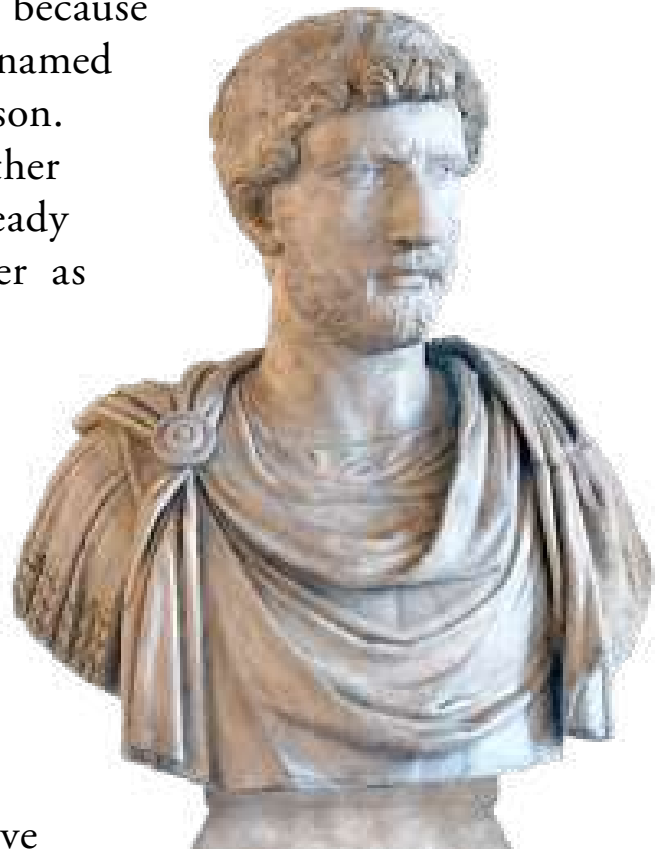


Hadrian, the Greekophile

Although Trajan was mourned, the transition to the next emperor went smoothly because Trajan had selected as his heir a man named Hadrian and adopted him as his son. The 41-year-old Hadrian was another well-qualified choice who had already established a long, successful career as a soldier and administrator.

Unlike Trajan, Hadrian did not embark on any new military conquests. He concentrated instead on stabilizing and organizing the empire. He greatly expanded the number of government divisions and reformed some; regularized and codified aspects of the Roman legal code; and gave attention to maintaining the army and securing the existing borders, the most visible symbol of which is the wall in northern Britain that bears his name.

Hadrian was a conscientious chief administrator, but by this time, the empire was simply growing too large to be effectively controlled by one man. Hadrian's solution to this problem was to travel constantly so that he could gain firsthand knowledge of the issues arising in the provinces. Indeed, he ended up spending more than half of his reign away from Rome, circling the empire and visiting every province in turn. His court was a mobile one that traveled with him.



Hadrian deeply loved Greek culture and was thought of as one of the most ardent admirers of all things Greek. The degree of his enthusiasm earned him the slightly disapproving nickname *Graeculus*, or "little Greek."

Although he spent a great deal of his reign away from Rome, he did not neglect the city. He built and restored a number of structures; most notably, he undertook a complete rebuilding of the Pantheon, which had originally been erected by Agrippa. Just outside of Rome, Hadrian constructed an enormous villa for himself in the countryside, near the town of Tivoli.



The Pantheon that is visited today by millions of tourists is Hadrian's version, and it is the best preserved of all Roman temples.

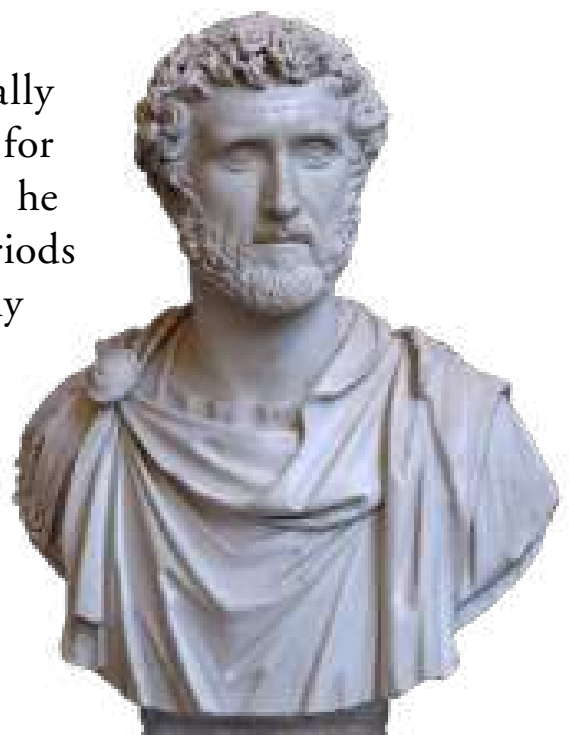
Like his predecessors, Hadrian paid careful attention to the issue of ensuring a good successor. He adopted as his son a man named Aurelius Antoninus, and then, looking even further in the future, had Antoninus adopt two promising boys, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. Thus, he tried to guarantee that Rome would continue to have a good leader for at least two more generations—and in this, he succeeded. After suffering from several chronic illnesses, Hadrian died in AD 138.



Hadrian was buried at Rome in a large circular mausoleum on the banks of the Tiber River. Later converted by the popes into a fortress, the great concrete drum that formed the core of the mausoleum still sits beside the Tiber and is now known as the Castel Sant'Angelo.

The Antonine Emperors

Aurelius Antoninus, who as emperor is usually referred to as Antoninus Pius, would reign for 23 years, and despite the length of his rule, he presided over one of the most uneventful periods in Roman history. Antoninus did not wage any major campaigns, and there were relatively few and minor rebellions, which were quickly suppressed. Antoninus did not construct any especially large or memorable buildings, nor did he institute any particularly significant new policies or initiatives. Instead, his reign was characterized by steadiness and consolidation.



Antoninus Pius is one of the few emperors about whom almost nothing negative was said in the ancient sources. He was unfailingly polite to the senate and active in disaster relief across the empire when earthquakes or floods struck. He gave public spectacles that were entertaining but not excessive, and he restored a number of buildings that had fallen into disrepair. He died in AD 161.

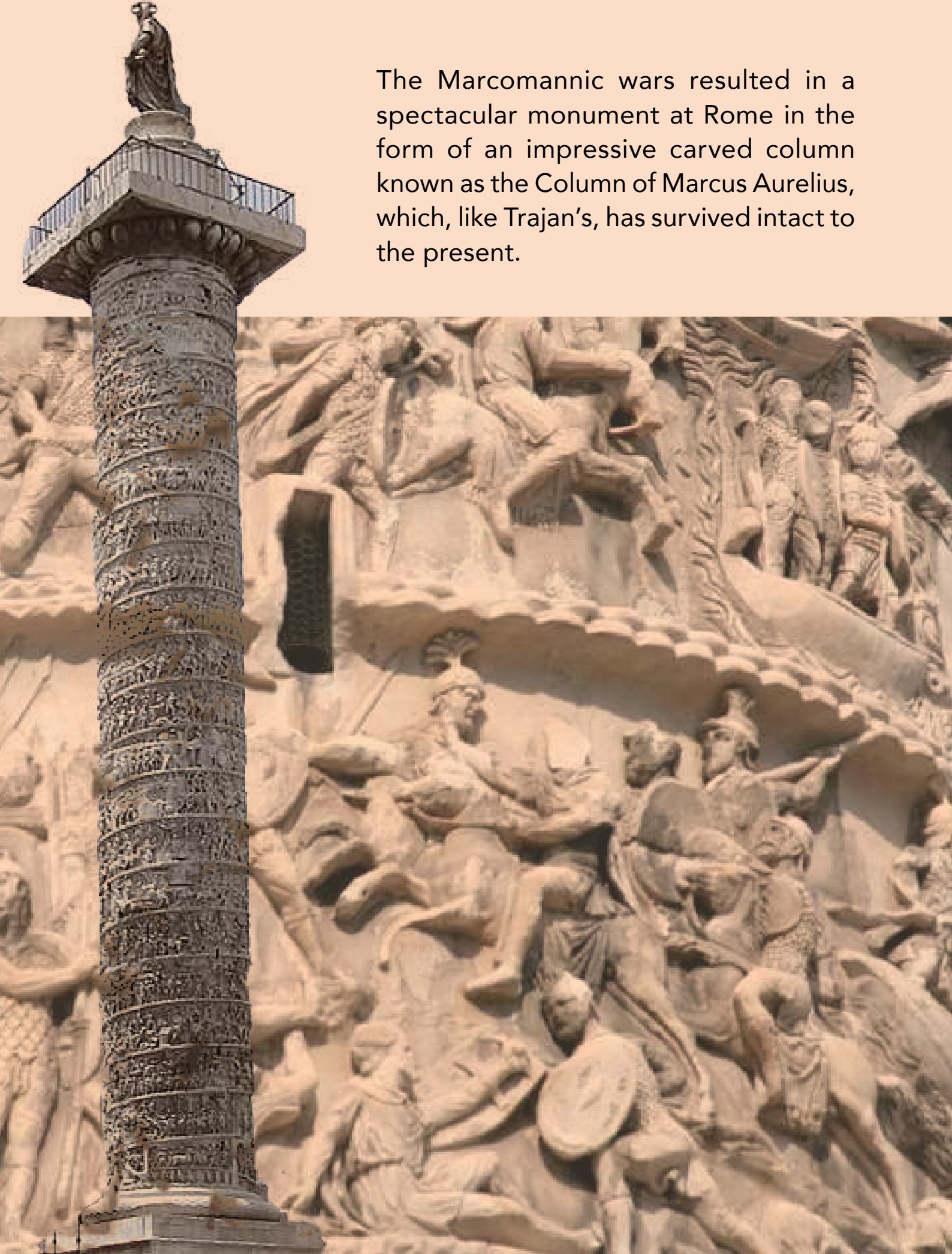
If the 2nd century was the golden age of Rome, then Antoninus's tenure was its high point and the calm of his reign was a sign of success.

In the latter part of Antoninus's reign, it had become apparent that of the two boys Hadrian had made him adopt—Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus—Marcus was the more dynamic one. Therefore, when Antoninus died, everyone looked to Marcus Aurelius to take over. He did so, but insisted that his stepbrother be appointed coheir, so technically Rome then acquired two emperors simultaneously. Despite the potential for conflict, the two men ruled amicably, splitting responsibilities for the next eight years, until Verus died of natural causes in AD 169.

The empire had a need for both men's talents, because almost immediately upon the death of Antoninus, new challenges appeared. In the east, there had been a regime change in Parthia, and the new king pursued an aggressive policy against their Roman rival, invading Armenia and Syria. Verus took the lead in the east, retaking the contested areas and invading Parthia itself, once again sacking the capital city of Ctesiphon. With the border successfully reestablished, the Roman forces withdrew. But the returning soldiers brought back with them from the east an infectious disease that quickly turned into a deadly epidemic that killed millions, amounting to as much as 10 percent of the empire's total population.

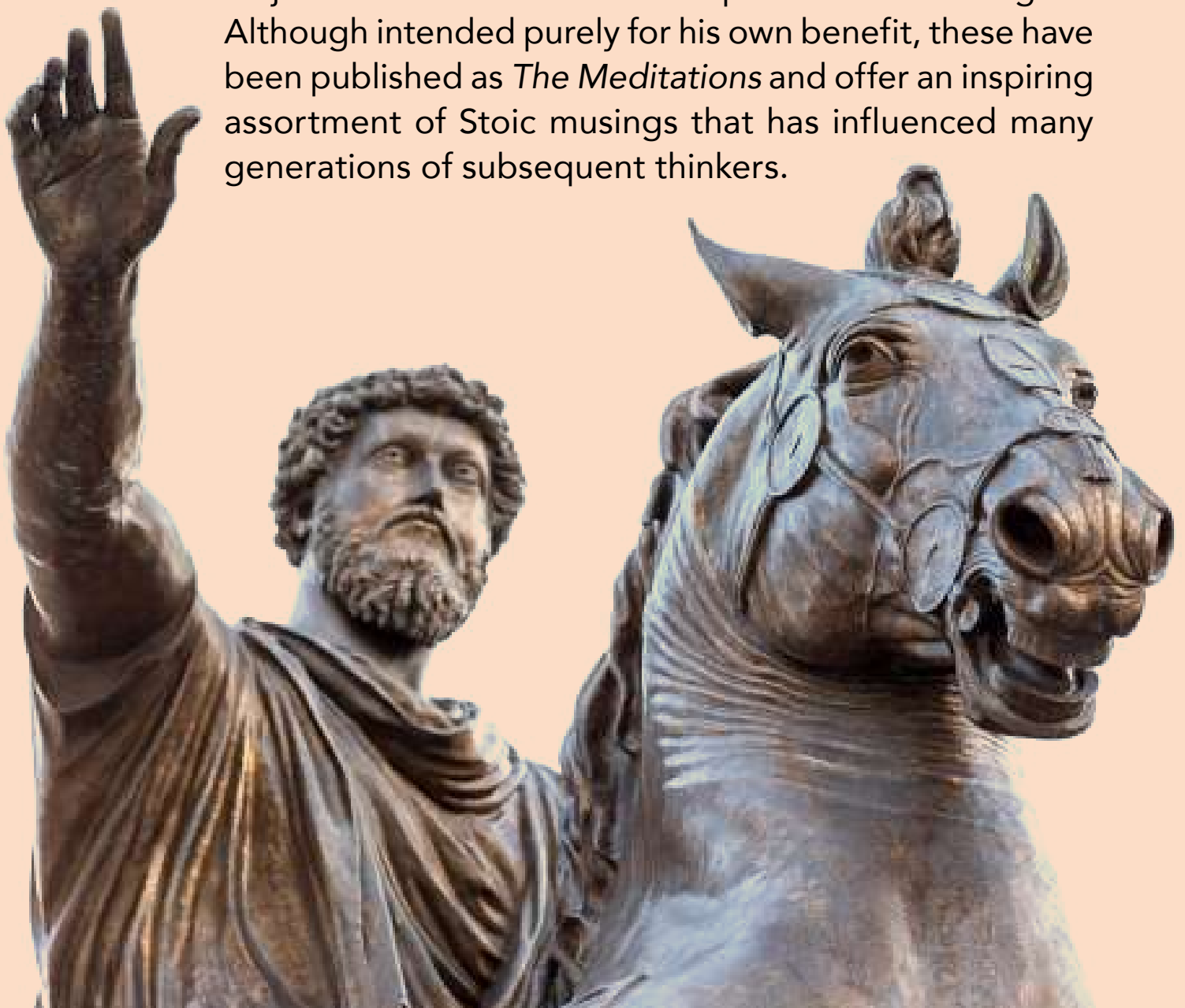


The Marcomannic wars resulted in a spectacular monument at Rome in the form of an impressive carved column known as the Column of Marcus Aurelius, which, like Trajan's, has survived intact to the present.



With the ranks of the legions guarding the Danube frontier severely depleted by the epidemic, the warlike tribes that lived north of that border apparently took advantage of Roman weakness by stepping up their raids. Marcus Aurelius decided that these tribes posed a serious enough threat that he would have to personally supervise the fight against them. The ensuing series of wars, known as the Marcomannic wars, would occupy his attention for much of the next 15 years.

Marcus Aurelius was a serious follower of the Stoic school of philosophy, and to console himself about the hardships of life while fighting along the Danube River, he jotted down a collection of aphorisms and thoughts. Although intended purely for his own benefit, these have been published as *The Meditations* and offer an inspiring assortment of Stoic musings that has influenced many generations of subsequent thinkers.



When it came time for Marcus to select an heir, he deviated from the practice set by the four previous “good” emperors and designated his own biological son, Commodus, as his heir. Predictably, this reversion to a hereditary method of succession was a disaster. When Commodus duly became emperor after the death of Marcus Aurelius in AD 180, he soon revealed himself to be another youthful megalomaniac in the mold of Nero, Caligula, and Domitian.

READINGS

Bennett, *Trajan*.

Birley, *Hadrian the Restless Emperor*.

———, *Marcus Aurelius*.

Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World*.

QUESTIONS

1. Which of the five good emperors do you think was the best? Why?
2. The 2nd century AD is often called the golden age of Roman history. How would you critique this assertion? And in what ways, and for which groups of people, does it not apply?

Before we pursue the narrative of Roman history further and observe the tragic consequences of Marcus Aurelius’s foolish choice of his son as heir—and indeed, before we embark upon tracing the long, complicated story of the empire’s decline and ultimate fall—let us pause with Rome still in its golden age and consider some aspects of Roman culture and civilization in the next several lectures, which investigate achievements of art, architecture, and literature as well as daily life.

For an examination of the lives of Roman women, children, and slaves as well as topics such as Roman religion, food, and employment, check out the Great Course *The Rise of Rome*.



**HAZARDS OF LIFE
IN ANCIENT ROME:
THE FIVE FS**

LECTURE 7

The ancient Rome of our imaginations is one of glory, power, and wealth. And while it was indeed a city of magnificent public structures and profligate spectacles, this is not the whole story. There was a darker, grittier side to life in ancient Rome. It was a crowded, noisy, smelly, and dangerous place to live. For the overwhelming majority of ordinary Romans, daily existence in the great capital was a grim struggle in which they were constantly menaced with an array of deadly threats that could strike without warning at any time. In particular, there were five major hazards that characterized life in ancient Rome and often played a far greater role in the lives of the city's inhabitants than the city's glories: floods, fires, famines, filth, and fevers.

The city of ancient Rome was at least twice as large as any other city of its time. By the late 1st century BC, the population of Rome was around 1 million people, and it stayed at this level for several centuries. This was an enormous population for a preindustrial city.

Despite its size, most of the hazards that ancient Romans faced would have also been familiar to any inhabitant of an ancient city. These may have been more intense at Rome due to its size, but any urban dweller in the Roman world would have experienced them at least to some degree.



Floods

Rome is famous as the city of seven hills, but between those hills, the valleys and plains where most of the city was actually located were originally marshy, low-lying land. During the rainy season, the earliest settlers of Rome had to use boats to move between the hills.

Much of the city of Rome was built on top of what were originally swamps, and when the Tiber River flooded, as it often did, these areas were submerged under water. Even worse, the city was situated along the banks of the Tiber at precisely the most flood-prone spot along its entire length. There were practical reasons involving communication routes for why Rome was built here, but nevertheless, the city's location doomed it to a 3,000-year struggle against flooding.



Tiber floods were frequent, severe, and destructive. On average, there was a major flood every 25 years and minor ones about every 5 years. The worst of these could result in water levels that rose 50 feet above normal and that inundated nearly all the major regions and monuments of the city, including such famous sites as the Roman Forum, the Colosseum, the Circus Maximus, and the Pantheon.

Floods wreak great havoc on both a city and its inhabitants. Many buildings can be undermined or weakened by the waters, resulting in spectacular collapses.

The floods also caused the sewers to back up, spreading filth and disease and spoiling the vital food supplies stored in the city's warehouses.

The wealthiest Romans overwhelmingly chose to locate their houses atop hills, which insulated them from many of the negative consequences of flooding. The poor—the vast majority of the populace—had to settle in the low-lying areas, and most of the buildings destroyed by floods appear to have been *insulae*, the often shoddily constructed apartment buildings in which most ordinary Romans lived.

Fires

At night in Rome, the only light source was small lamps fueled by olive oil. Also, everyone had to cook over open flames, and because apartments rarely included kitchens, cooking might entail building a bonfire on the floor of one's apartment. Not surprisingly, in the cramped living conditions of the city, it was all too easy for a spark to jump to a combustible surface or for someone to knock over a lamp and ignite a dangerous fire.

The way that the city was laid out exacerbated the threat of fires. Because Rome had grown organically from a small village, its streets were a jumbled maze of narrow, twisting paths that offered little or no barrier to the spread of fires. Under these conditions, once a fire had grown beyond its starting point, it was nearly impossible to extinguish.

It seems that not a night went by without a serious fire somewhere in Rome, and larger fires that destroyed entire neighborhoods appear to have occurred roughly every other year.

In an attempt to combat the danger posed by fires, the first emperor, Augustus, set up a brigade of 7,000 night watchmen who patrolled the city carrying buckets and axes. When they spotted a fire, they would fill up their buckets at the nearest fountain and fling water on the fire. But such methods would only have been effective on very small blazes; they would have done little to quench a blazing eight-story apartment building. The only real hope was to catch fires before they could spread.

The worst fire to strike Rome was the Great Fire of AD 64, which broke out around the east end of the Circus Maximus. This terrible conflagration burned for nine days, and by the end of it, nearly the entire city was affected, with 10 of Rome's 14 districts devastated by the inferno.



Famines

While wealthy elites enjoyed lavish banquets and exotic delicacies, for probably around 80 percent of the city's inhabitants, about 80 percent of their diet would have been a monotonous round of just three basic staples: grain, consumed in the form of bread or a soup-like gruel; olives, usually ingested in the form of olive oil; and wine.

Because of Rome's enormous size, local resources were nowhere near enough to support the city's populace. Therefore, food had to be imported on a gigantic scale from all over the Mediterranean, particularly from Egypt, North Africa, Sicily, and Spain. To sustain the city's inhabitants, a minimum of 500,000 tons of the three basic foodstuffs had to be imported to Rome from overseas provinces during the summer sailing season, stored in warehouses, and then distributed throughout the year.

The food supply system of Rome was a delicate construct, and crop failures, natural disasters, war, piracy, and mismanagement could easily disrupt it, resulting in food shortages and, in severe cases, even famine.



In the 1st century of the empire, there were at least 20 times when there were food shortages so severe that they provoked rioting. The worst of these riots involved pitched battles in the streets, senators threatened with being burned alive, and even the emperor being attacked.

Filth

Rome famously consumed huge amounts of food, water, and marble. But Rome's immense population was an equally profligate producer, and its two main physical products were corpses and sewage. It has been estimated that, every day, ancient Rome's inhabitants would have produced approximately 350,000 gallons of urine, 100,000 pounds of feces, and 150 dead bodies. Unfortunately, much of this ended up in the streets of the city.

When one adds to this the waste products of Rome's animals and the various other types of refuse and garbage generated by the city and then factors in the Romans' complete ignorance of the germ theory of disease, the result was a level of hygiene and sanitation that, by modern standards, was truly appalling.

While the majority of Romans received some basic form of cremation or burial, it has been estimated that each year in ancient Rome at least 1,500 human corpses ended up simply abandoned in the streets, where they rotted and were scavenged by animals. Public officials may occasionally have had these corpses hauled away, but a number of ancient literary anecdotes testify that decomposing bodies were a common sight in the streets. Adding to the human bodies in the streets would have been thousands of carcasses from Rome's considerable population of animals, both domesticated and wild.

The primary purpose of Rome's sewers was not to carry away waste, but instead to provide drainage. Very few structures possessed latrines that were connected to the sewers. One cause for this is that there are compelling practical reasons why one would not actually have wanted a direct connection to the sewer within one's dwelling.

There were no valves or water traps in Roman plumbing, so a connection to the sewer meant that a lot of things you would rather not have coming into your home would have gained easy access: The noxious smells and gases down in the sewer would have risen up through the hole; the system would back up during floods, and gouts of sewer-contaminated water would gush up into your dwelling; and all the vermin and pests living in the sewer would have a convenient entryway into your house.

Because of this, in most Roman homes, the latrine would have consisted of a clay pot in a corner that, when full, was in theory supposed to be lugged outside and down the street to the nearest sewer opening, where the contents could be poured in. Particularly for the poor, most of whom lived on the upper floors of high-rise apartment buildings, hauling a full pot of reeking sewage down many flights of stairs was not exactly an appealing prospect. Therefore, many, if not most, of these chamber pots were emptied by simply dumping the pot's contents out the window. Thus, much of Rome's sewage and garbage ended up in the streets. While technically illegal, it was nevertheless routine practice.

When this practice is multiplied by the number of Rome's inhabitants and the sum total of human waste is augmented by the excreta of Rome's animals, the total amount of raw sewage being deposited in a relatively small area was overwhelming.

The biological waste deposited in the city's roadways was then trampled together with water, mud, and garbage to form a vile and stinky layer of muck. Many of Rome's streets probably more closely resembled swampy bogs of human waste and garbage than what we would today envision as roads.

To attempt to contain the river of sludge in Rome's streets is one reason Roman cities typically have very high sidewalks, as any visitor to Pompeii can see today. It also explains why many wealthy Romans preferred to be carried through the streets on litters with perfumed curtains.



Fevers

All four of the previous characteristics combined to produce the fifth: fevers, or disease. Under such conditions, the inhabitants of ancient Rome suffered from a wide assortment of diseases. Information from ancient authors can be combined with forensic examination of ancient skeletons to create a vivid, if depressing, portrait of the kinds of diseases that were common among Rome's populace.

First, malnutrition and the lack of variety in the diet would have made a number of diseases nearly universal. Among the more prevalent of these were scurvy, pellagra, beriberi, and rickets.

Second, the poor levels of sanitation caused by the presence everywhere of carcasses and excrement, both animal and human; the scavenging dogs, birds, rats, flies, and other vermin; and the general overcrowding would all have combined to foster the growth of diseases and to spread them rapidly throughout the city. Some of the more common diseases falling into this category included malaria, dysentery, cholera, and typhoid. Poor sanitation would also have resulted in widespread affliction with internal parasites and worms.



Data derived from Roman tombstones suggest that malaria was a leading cause of death in ancient Rome. While malaria itself does not usually result in death, when added on top of the several preexisting illnesses that the typical Roman might have, it seems to have often acted as a final and fatal affliction.

All the diseases described so far would have been more or less endemic in ancient Rome, meaning that they were constantly present, but the city was also prone to occasional, sporadic outbreaks of other infectious diseases, such as the plague. When they affect a substantial percentage of the population, such outbreaks are called epidemics, and Rome suffered many of these, often resulting in large numbers of deaths in a short period of time.

READINGS

Aldrete, *Daily Life in the Roman City*.

———, *Floods of the Tiber in Ancient Rome*.

Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply in the Graeco-Roman World*.

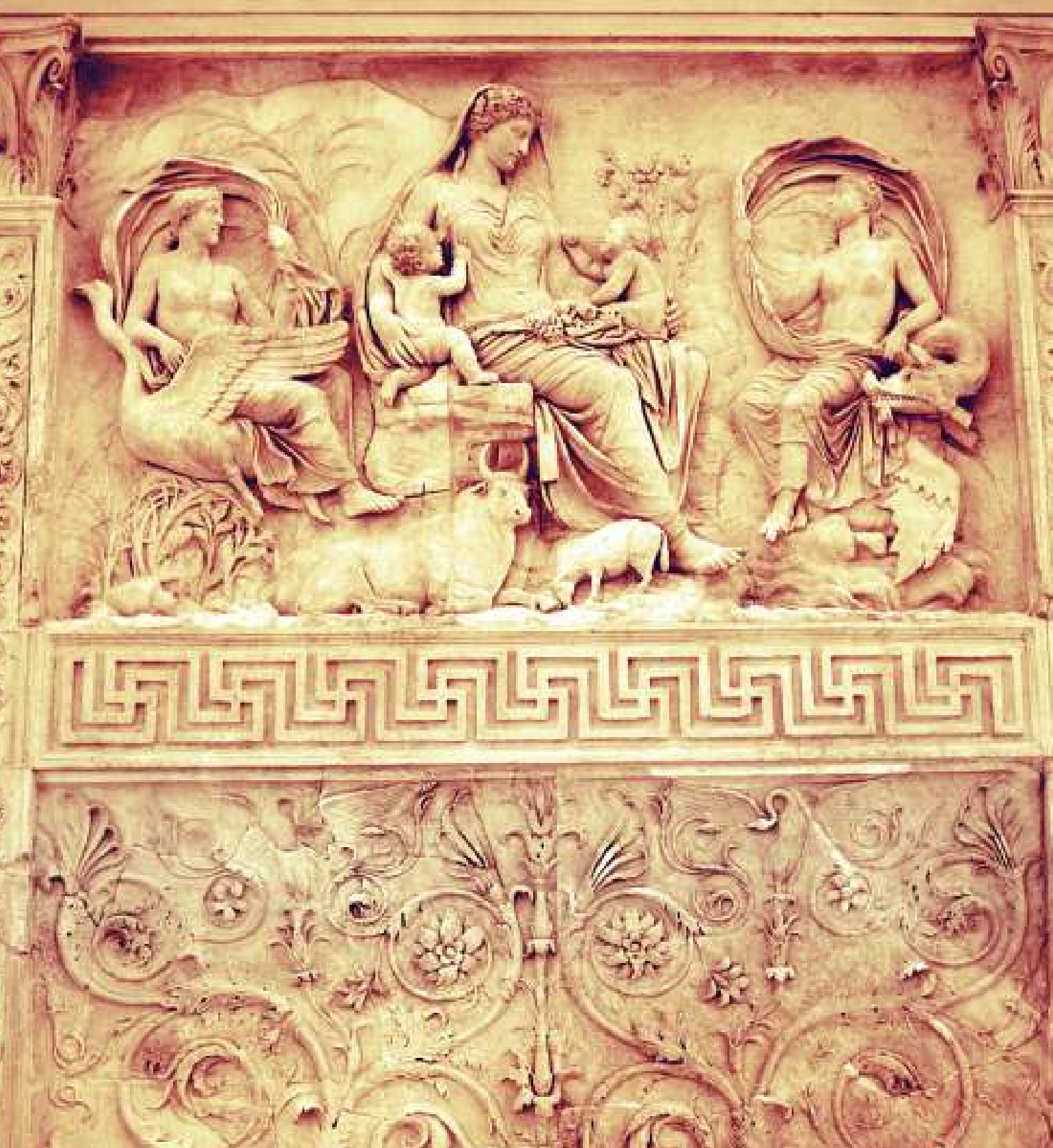
Scobie, “Slums, Sanitation, and Mortality in the Roman World.”

QUESTIONS

1. To what degree do you think each of the urban problems described in this lecture was unique to Rome, and how much are they common to all large cities in general?
2. From a modern perspective, some have argued that the Romans appear to have been surprisingly indifferent to the suffering caused by many of these problems. Do you agree? If so, what might account for this? And what does it reveal about Roman culture?

While Roman historians argue about the exact death rate in ancient Rome, it's safe to say that the city was a generally unhealthy environment in which to live. The health hazards were particularly dangerous to the very old and the very young. Rates of infant mortality were horrifically high, with perhaps as many as a third of babies not surviving their first year of life.

In addition to these serious health hazards threatening Rome's inhabitants, two other unpleasant aspects of urban life were incessant noise and severe overcrowding.



ROMAN ART AND ARCHITECTURE

LECTURE 8

Prior to the 3rd century BC, the greatest influence on Roman art and architecture was the indigenous Italian civilization of the Etruscans. The Romans imitated many aspects of Etruscan art and architecture, and in turn, the cosmopolitan Etruscans were in contact with the Greeks and were influenced by them. But it was really the sack of Syracuse in 212 BC by the Roman general Marcus Claudius Marcellus and his men—who returned to Rome with a rich trove of Greek art—that marked the moment when Greek art was introduced to Rome on a massive scale. The exposure of Romans to Greek culture and art through these artworks would fundamentally transform all of Roman culture and civilization.

Early Roman Art and Portrait Busts

One of the most enduring and famous forms of Roman art is bronze and marble sculpture. When we look at the surviving Roman bronze sculptures from the era of the republic, it is immediately apparent that, for the Romans, art was often used to reinforce or express Roman values and had an almost propagandistic purpose.



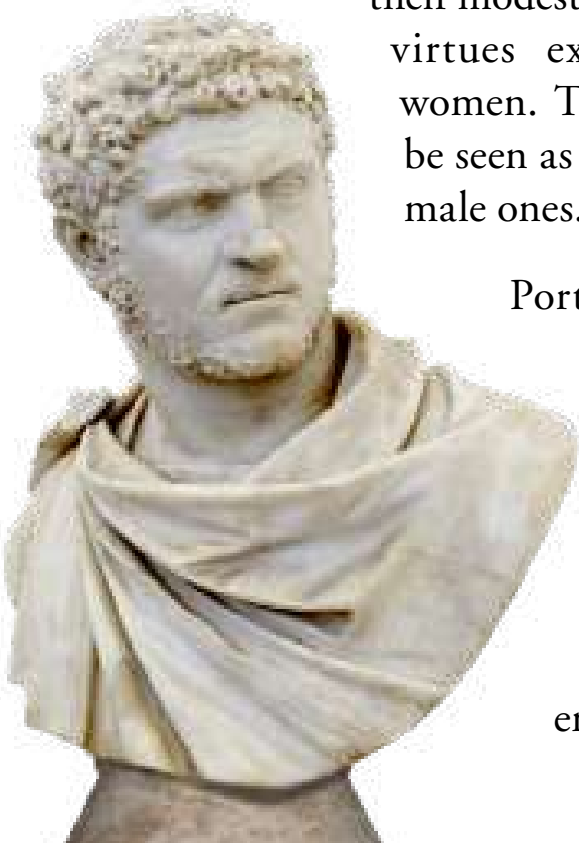
What became the most distinctively Roman type of sculpture was the form known as the portrait bust. In dramatic contrast to classical Greek sculpture—which had focused on generic idealized representations of muscular, young men—Roman portrait busts are highly realistic images of specific individuals that were meant to accurately capture their likenesses.

Because the people most likely to have their portraits memorialized in stone or bronze were successful aristocrats, this means that there are countless Roman portrait busts of old men. At first glance, these may seem unflattering because they accurately show every wrinkle, wart, and receding hairline of their subjects, but for the Romans, this kind of hyperrealism was the point—you were supposed to be able to recognize the person.

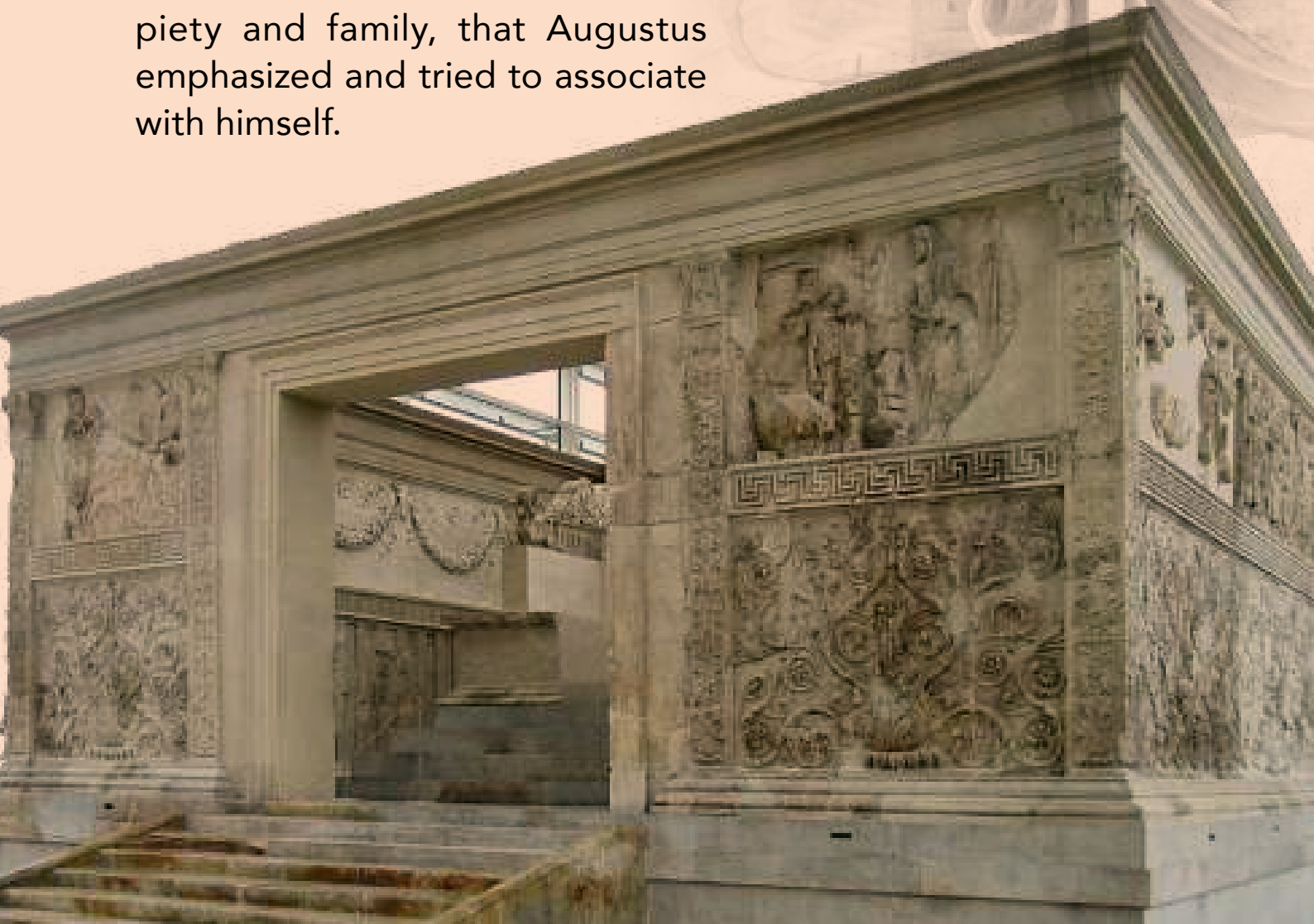
These men and their busts were also intended as embodiments of Roman virtues, and their advanced age was part of what lent them their dignity. Upper-class Roman families kept collections of wax death masks of their ancestors, and these images were the focal point of family rituals, so this tradition may also have influenced the veristic style of Roman portrait sculpture.

While most portraits were of men, there are also some portraying aristocratic women. Frequently, such women are depicted in a characteristic posture with one arm across their torso and the other raised up with the hand held alongside their cheek. Termed the *pudicitia* pose, this stance represented their modesty—one of the paramount virtues expected of upper-class women. Thus, these portraits can be seen as female equivalents of the male ones.

Portrait busts often truly seem to capture some of the personality of the subject. The portrait bust tradition continued into the empire, and when you gaze at ones of the emperors, even if you don't know who they are, often you can almost tell whether they were a good emperor, a bad emperor, or even a crazy one.



Augustus was a master of using art for propaganda purposes. A vivid example is the Ara Pacis, or Altar of Peace, an altar dedicated by Augustus at Rome that was surrounded by a screen of fine white marble. The walls of this screen are filled with delicately carved images, including a procession of magistrates, senators, priests, and, at the end, Augustus's friends and family. These reliefs are a mixture of Roman realism and Greek idealism and function as a visual expression of traditional values, such as piety and family, that Augustus emphasized and tried to associate with himself.



Roman Architectural Innovations

Until Augustus, Roman architecture consisted mostly of imitations of Etruscan or Greek models, for example, in the way temples were constructed. These adopted the familiar form, with triangular pediments and columns that followed the conventions of the Greek architectural orders.

Unlike Greek temples, early Roman ones were set upon a high platform called a podium and had a frontal orientation. This meant that there were stairs only at the front, and the columns did not extend all the way around, as on Greek temples, but were restricted either to the front or to the front and sides.

The Romans employed plenty of decorative marbles on their public buildings, but usually only as an exterior veneer. The structural core of most monumental Roman structures was brick or concrete. The widespread use of concrete was one of the greatest Roman contributions in terms of architecture, and sometimes historians speak of the Roman “concrete revolution.”

Concrete allowed the Romans to construct buildings in a much greater variety of shapes and forms than had been previously possible. By pouring the concrete into wooden molds, the Romans could craft structures with curving walls and ceilings or any number of other unusual shapes. The Romans even invented a special type of concrete using pulverized volcanic stones that would harden underwater, which they employed to build gigantic harbors with quays, breakwaters, and moorings for ships.

Another major Roman architectural innovation was the widespread use of the vault, a series of stones cut to form a self-supporting curved arch when placed together. When two vaults are arranged at right angles, they create a framework that allows huge rooms that don’t require columns in the middle to hold up the roof. Vaults were used in some of the largest structures made by the Romans, such as the bath complexes discussed in a previous lecture.

One of the most famous, best preserved, and most influential of all Roman buildings is the Pantheon in Rome. Its design, which is unique among Roman temples, was another revolutionary innovation. The word *pantheon* means “temple to all the gods.”



The building that can be seen today is not the original version of the Pantheon, which was erected in 27 BC by Agrippa and seems to have been a fairly conventional rectangular temple. It was rebuilt on a grander scale by the emperor Hadrian sometime between AD 118 and 128.

When viewed from the front, Hadrian's Pantheon has a standard appearance. There is a podium with steps leading up to a porch with several rows of columns. Above this is a typical triangular pediment. Hadrian kept the original inscription so that, even though this building has almost nothing to do with Agrippa's, the pediment reads "MAGRIPPA L F COS TERTIVM FECIT," meaning "Marcus Agrippa, the son of Lucius, consul three times, built it."

After entering the building through a set of massive bronze doors, one would expect to find oneself inside the usual cramped and dark rectangular interior. Instead, visitors to the Pantheon step into an enormous circular space 142 feet wide. Even more astonishing, the space overhead is surmounted by a colossal dome 142 feet high. The dome is a perfect half-circle, so that a sphere with the same diameter would exactly fit within the structure.



The dome of the Pantheon remained the largest such concrete span until 1958.

The only source of light is a circular 27-foot-wide opening in the top of the dome called an oculus, which creates a dramatic circular shaft of light that moves around the interior over the course of the day.

The engineering underlying this marvel is particularly impressive. One secret is that the architects employed a wide range of materials so that the lower levels are constructed of thick, dense substances best able to bear the weight of the dome, while the components grow increasingly lighter at progressively higher levels of the structure. Thus, the lowest sections are made of solid stone, travertine, and tufa; these sections give way to tufa and brick and then just brick in the middle levels. The dome itself is made of concrete with the light volcanic stone pumice mixed in. The concrete of the dome steadily narrows in thickness from about 24 feet at the top of the drum that supports it to only 4 feet at the oculus.

The whole thing was so well constructed that despite having to support such a huge expanse of roof without any internal struts, it remains standing intact today, 2,000 years later. One reason for the Pantheon's survival was its reconsecration as a Christian church in AD 608.

The Pantheon is arguably one of the most influential buildings of all time. Its formula of a square façade graced with columns surmounted by a triangular pediment fronting a huge dome and containing a circular interior space has become a stock design for many government buildings and museums, including the US Capitol building in Washington DC as well as nearly every state capitol building across the United States.

Among the other well-known Roman buildings were those constructed for public spectacles, such as the Colosseum, where gladiator contests were staged, and the Circus Maximus, the venue for chariot racing.



Practical Architecture

In addition to magnificent decorative buildings, Rome built sophisticated practical structures that were often just as impressive simply due to their scale. Roman aqueducts, bridges, walls, sewers, and roads are justly famous, and many of them are still standing today.

The first Roman aqueduct was completed in 312 BC by the energetic censor Appius Claudius Caecus. Named the Aqua Appia after its builder, it drew water from springs approximately nine miles outside of Rome and transported it to the city through pipes and channels.

Contrary to the modern stereotype of Roman aqueducts as a series of tall stone arches, this first aqueduct was located mostly underground. Later aqueducts would include some sections carried on lofty above-ground arches, but even in the fully developed system, the overall percentage of aqueducts that were on such arches was less than 10 percent.



By the early 4th century AD, the city of Rome was being supplied by more than a dozen aqueducts, which were collectively capable of bringing more than 250 million gallons of fresh water to the city every day from as far away as 60 miles. This bounty was distributed to the populace through a complex network of pipes and tanks that delivered this water to nearly 1,500 public fountains and pools as well as almost 900 public and private baths.

This water distribution system was overseen by a high-ranking state official who supervised a large staff of specialists including engineers, and it was maintained by 700 well-trained slaves organized into several divisions.

Decoration and Decorative Arts

One characteristic of both monumental public structures and the homes of upper-class Romans was that the floors and walls were highly decorated. Much of the expense and effort that in modern buildings might be spent on furniture and decorative objects the Romans directed toward ornamenting the structure itself. Walls were plastered over and then covered with elaborate paintings, while the floors were coated with intricate mosaics.

To a modern viewer, the palette of colors employed in Roman wall paintings might appear strange, dominated as it was by large expanses of black, gold, and a distinctive deep-bloodred shade.



Floor mosaics were made by pressing very small cut pieces of colored stones into wet mortar to create images. The most basic mosaics consist of simple black-and-white geometric patterns. Next are ones that use fairly large black and white stones to create pictures, ranging from animals to business advertisements. The most expensive type of mosaic was made out of colored stones. Some of the tesserae used were so small that the finished product looks more like a painting than a mosaic, and such mosaics are spectacular works of art.

Much fine craftsmanship and ornamentation went into producing smaller decorative objects, such as jewelry, carved gems, glass containers, and bronze cups and vessels.



The subject matter of these mosaics was extremely diverse, with some of the most elaborate examples depicting historical scenes, mythological stories, wild beasts both exotic and mundane, and realistically rendered sea life.

READINGS

Adam, *Roman Building Materials and Techniques*.

Ramage and Ramage, *Roman Art*.

Tuck, *A History of Roman Art*.

Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*.

QUESTIONS

1. Does the fact that so much of Roman art was produced in order to reinforce Roman values affect the way you view it or evaluate it as art?
2. Many of the practical structures built by the Romans, such as the aqueducts, are beautiful as well as functional. To what degree should aesthetics be a consideration for such structures?

Perhaps the most commonly surviving type of Roman art are the gold, silver, and bronze coins that Roman mints churned out in the millions. These tiny pieces of metal, while intended to serve a practical monetary function, are fine examples of artistic skill, bearing Latin slogans and exceptionally detailed images.

While coins minted during the republic usually do not depict real people, those of the empire almost always bear a superb portrait in profile of the current emperor on one side.



ROMAN LITERATURE

LECTURE 9

Latin literature was deeply influenced by its Greek predecessor, and the first wave of literature written in Latin—starting in 240 BC, when the first recorded play written in Latin, by Livius Andronicus, was staged at Rome—seems to have consisted predominantly of imitations of Greek works, especially plays, and to have drawn its subject matter mainly from Greek mythology, such as the stories found in Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Certainly, the Romans were composing many forms of writing prior to 240 BC, from complex formal ones to more personal and quotidian ones. Likely, there were also at least some written works that recorded Italic stories and histories. But all the way up until the last few centuries of the Roman Republic, such indigenous literary productions were not regarded very highly and remained very much in the shadow of the brilliant corpus of Greek literature.



The most prolific author of the late republic was the orator, statesman, and philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero. More writings survive from Cicero than from any other author in the ancient world, and because of him, the late republic is one of the best-understood periods in Roman history.

A famous exact contemporary of Cicero was Julius Caesar, whose autobiographical narratives, *The Gallic Wars* and *The Civil Wars*, give insight into his military genius as well as provide generations of students with models of a clear Latin prose style.

For more information on Cicero and Caesar, check out the Great Course *The Rise of Rome*.

The Golden Age of Latin Literature

The phase of Roman literature after the late republic was known as the golden age, and it corresponded with the reign of the first emperor, Augustus. This short period produced three poets of great talent.

The emperor Augustus was keenly aware of the value of propaganda as a means to promote himself and thus desired to have his achievements memorialized in poetry. Accordingly, Augustus's henchman and unofficial minister of culture, Maecenas, played an active role in encouraging poets and directing their efforts toward producing such panegyrics. In one way or another, the works of all three of the great golden age poets were direct reactions to Augustus's patronage.

The most obvious example of this can be seen in the case of the poet Horace, who composed patriotic poems praising the reign of Augustus and created poems that celebrated specific events in Augustus's life. Horace also wrote satires that poked fun at various human behaviors but were usually meant in a good-natured rather than a cruel way. Horace produced hundreds of poems in a wide variety of styles, including elegies, love poems, odes, and hymns. Many Latin phrases from his poetry continue to be repeated even today, such as *carpe diem*, or "seize the day."



Whereas Horace did what the emperor Augustus wanted, the next poet, Ovid, created a work that greatly displeased him. This was the *Ars amatoria*, which can be translated as *The Art of Love*, which is basically a manual of advice on how to seduce women. He provides practical recommendations for wooing a woman, such as "Wear clean clothes" and "Don't have bad breath." But he also gives amoral advice, such as for would-be lovers to promise a woman anything, because, as he puts it, "Promises cost you nothing." The emperor Augustus was very concerned with public morality and in consequence was offended by Ovid's *Art of Love*. In fact, he was so perturbed that he banished Ovid and sent him to live in exile.



While in exile, Ovid produced some significant literature, most notably the *Metamorphoses*, a colossal retelling and compilation of Greek and Roman myths that became important in later times as one of our main sources for ancient mythology.

Another interesting work of Ovid is the *Heroides*. Composed earlier in his career, this is a collection of fictional letters in verse written from the perspectives of famous women from myth and history, including Dido, Ariadne, Sappho, and Helen of Troy.

The last of the three golden age poets was Virgil. Augustus wanted Virgil to write a great epic poem celebrating his reign. His hope was that Virgil would be the Roman version of Homer and would compose a grand national epic that would be the cornerstone of Roman literature. But rather than writing his epic poem about the current emperor Augustus, Virgil instead chose to describe Rome's earliest days, telling the story of the origins of the Latin people. This epic poem, called the *Aeneid*, also cleverly created a link between Greek mythology and Roman legend by centering on the character of Aeneas, who is mentioned in Homer's *Iliad*. Ultimately, the poem does extol Augustus, because the emperor's family traced its lineage directly back to Aeneas. This not only linked Augustus to the legendary founders of Rome, but actually bestowed divine ancestry upon him as well, because Aeneas's mother was said to be the goddess Venus.

Virgil died before he had quite finished the *Aeneid*, and—because he did not want it published in less-than-perfect form—in his will, he ordered that it be burned. Augustus, however, personally intervened to save the manuscript and had it published in its current form.

The Silver Age of Latin Literature

The next era of Latin literature—the silver age—comprises roughly the century following the death of Augustus. One writer of this era, Seneca the Younger, lived through the reigns of Caligula and Claudius and was the personal tutor of the emperor Nero.

In an age when the emperors exemplified excess, Seneca advocated a return to simpler values and lifestyles. He was a philosopher of the Stoic school and wrote a number of philosophical dialogues and essays, including one called “On Anger.” Seneca also wrote 124 short *Moral Letters*, in which he outlines bits of his beliefs on a wide range of topics, including suicide, virtue, retirement, and drunkenness. Seneca’s philosophical works both earned him renown during his lifetime and influenced later generations. In addition to his philosophical treatises, Seneca wrote a number of tragic plays that are particularly gruesome variants of traditional Greek mythological themes. These plays are very different from his other works; they are melodramatic, sensational, and a bit overwrought. During the Renaissance, they were considered to be terrific, but other periods have found them less admirable.



Following Pythagorean philosophy, Seneca was a vegetarian, although this earned him a reputation for eccentricity.

In the end, Seneca could not control his pupil, the emperor Nero, and decided to commit suicide before Nero could have him murdered.

Extended prose works of fiction were not thought of as a high form of literature at the time, but one rare surviving novel from this period is the *Metamorphoses* by Apuleius. More popularly known as *The Golden Ass*, it relates the episodic adventures of its protagonist, Lucius, who as the novel opens is a young man entirely driven by curiosity and pleasure. After witnessing a witch performing magic, he attempts to copy her but gets the spell wrong, with the result that he is transformed into a donkey—the ass of the title. Lucius sets off on a series of comic misadventures in ass form during which he changes owners multiple times and suffers many indignities. The book concludes with Lucius restored to human form and being inducted as an initiate of the goddess Isis in a mystical ritual.

The second novel surviving from this time is Petronius's *Satyricon*, which recounts the comic misadventures of two bumbling and opportunistic men, Encolpius and Ascyltus. The centerpiece of the novel, however, and its most famous scene, occurs when they manage to snare an invitation to the extravagant dinner party of a former slave, Trimalchio, who has both gained his freedom and amassed an enormous fortune. This astonishing dinner takes up nearly half the book and is an incredible orgy of food and excess. Unfortunately, the end of the manuscript is lost, so we don't know the conclusion of the novel.



The rambunctious novels *The Golden Ass* and *Satyricon* give insight into aspects of daily life in the ancient world and provide a useful counterpoint to the predominantly upper-class-focused sources.

The silver age also featured several poets who addressed similarly humble topics. Martial was the master of the epigram, a short poem that often functions as witty mockery or an insult.

Another poet, Juvenal, was the author of 16 *Satires*, which are scathing poems critiquing aspects of Roman culture. The most important of these from a historical perspective is probably his third satire, “Against the City of Rome,” because it gives us one of the most candid portraits of what life was like for the poor inhabitants of the city. Juvenal vividly describes such things as the crowded, unpleasant streets and the condescending, arrogant attitudes of the rich toward the poor.

Other Genres of Latin Writing

In addition to poems, plays, and novels, Roman authors produced works in a number of other genres. History writing is one important example.

In his mammoth multivolume work, the 1st-century writer Livy traced Roman history from the foundation of the city up through his own time and gave Rome its definitive catalog of legendary heroes.

Polybius recounted Rome’s rapid expansion under the republic and its stunning conquest of the Greek world.

During the late republic, Sallust described the conspiracy of Catiline and wars against the resourceful North African leader Jugurtha.

The reigns of the early emperors were chronicled by the historian Tacitus, famous for his terse but forceful prose style.

While some of these authors wrote in Greek rather than Latin, they all lived in the Roman world and were deeply engaged in trying to explain and understand its history.

Later historians, such as Ammianus Marcellinus and Cassius Dio, continued the story, tracing the course of the Roman Empire's apex and eventual decline.

These chronological histories are supplemented by biographies, such as those of Suetonius, who loved to recount sensationalistic details of the emperors' private lives, and those of the Greek author Plutarch, who penned dozens of colorful biographies of famous men, emphasizing how their personal qualities explained their successes or failures.

Another prolific category of Roman writing is technical works.

Columella, Varro, and Cato all wrote treatises outlining best practices for farming.

Pliny the Elder cranked out an enormous 37-volume encyclopedia of observations about the natural world entitled *Natural History*. It consists of everything from endless catalogs of different types of rocks and plants to detailed sections on zoology, mining, medicine, painting, sculpture, and astronomy.

Examples of other technical writers and their topics include Vegetius on the art of war, Frontinus on the aqueducts of Rome, Vitruvius on engineering and architecture, Quintilian on oratory and rhetoric, and Celsus and Galen on medicine.

As we progress through the empire toward late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, there is a huge body of texts concerning early Christianity. In addition to the Gospels and Apocrypha, there are copious writings of early Church leaders and intellectuals.

In the late 2nd century AD, Tertullian vigorously attacked pagan ideas, defended and explained Christian ones, and addressed contemporary issues in theology.

In the 4th century, the bishop Eusebius wrote a history of the Christian church up to his own time, as well as an eyewitness account of the emperor Constantine's pivotal conversion to Christianity.

Other especially important early Christian authors include Origen, some of whose controversial ideas meant that, in contrast to most of his peers, he was never canonized as a saint; Ambrose, an important theological writer whose hymns shaped Christian devotional music; and Jerome, who produced the most influential Latin translation of the Bible.

The most prolific early Christian author was Augustine, who is claimed to have written more than 1,000 works. Not all of these survive, but particularly significant are his *Confessions*, an autobiographical account of his own life that also explored and defined many issues of faith and theology, and *The City of God*, a work prompted by the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in AD 410 that lays out a powerful and influential vision of both humanity and Christianity.



READINGS

Braund, *Latin Literature*.

Conte, *Latin Literature*.

Harrison, ed., *A Companion to Latin Literature*.

QUESTIONS

1. How derivative do you think Roman literature really is of Greek literature? What are the areas in which it seems most original or distinctively Roman?
2. If you were a historian assigned to write a description of Roman civilization and culture, how would you assess the relative usefulness of the different categories of Roman literature (such as poetry, epic, plays, technical literature, religious writings, biographies, histories, etc.)? What are the advantages and potential dangers of relying on each?

From Livius Andronicus to Augustine, the literature produced in the Roman world spans a wide range of perspectives and subject matter, but all of it was shaped by the culture and context within which it was written and thus can help illuminate the civilization of the Romans for us today.



THE ORDINARY ROMAN SPEAKS: GRAFFITI

LECTURE 10



The surviving literary sources from the ancient Roman world were authored almost exclusively by wealthy men of the upper classes, even though such men comprised far less than one-half of one percent of the total population of those living in the Roman Empire.

Inevitably, the works produced by this tiny group of upper-class men reflect their own specific concerns, customs, perspectives, and prejudices, yet these documents have been used as the basis for our understanding of what the entire ancient Roman world as a whole was like.

This lecture and the following one look beyond the traditional primary source material written by the upper classes in order to examine two types of information that survive from nonelites—graffiti and tombstone inscriptions—and how these give us a richer and more complete vision of all strata of Roman society.

One of the most ephemeral forms of written record is graffiti. It is often scribbled or scratched with improvised tools on walls and spaces that are exposed to the harsh elements outdoors, actively sought out and erased or painted over by the annoyed owners of buildings upon which it is found, and defaced or written over by later or rival graffitists. Those who scratch, carve, paint, or write messages on walls are likely not thinking that they are leaving a record that will be passed down through the ages. As a source of information, however, graffiti is intriguing because it does not represent the views of one group, but rather tends to be written by a broad range of individuals. An entire body of such scribblings has improbably survived from the Roman era.

Graffiti at Pompeii

Throughout history, Italians have been drawn to the scenic beauty of the Bay of Naples, whose curving shore is given a majestic backdrop by the tall cone of Mount Vesuvius. During the sweltering summer, many wealthy ancient Romans escaped the city of Rome and moved to luxurious villas along the bay, where the cool sea breezes provided relief from the heat.

However, in the early afternoon of August 24 in AD 79, Mount Vesuvius erupted. According to the eyewitness account of Pliny the Younger, who survived the eruption, a massive dirty-white, tree-shaped cloud rose above the mountain while lava flowed from its sides. Over the next several days, material spewed from Vesuvius, covering surrounding regions under a thick layer of pumice.

The devastated areas included the prosperous cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, which were entombed beneath a blanket of volcanic ash more than four meters thick. The volcanic flows that destroyed these cities paradoxically also preserved many fragile items that would otherwise have been lost, such as wooden objects, papyrus scrolls, wall paintings, and even the graffiti on the walls. The accidental preservation of this highly perishable evidence of everyday life has done much to fill out our understanding of Roman civilization.



The walls lining the streets of Pompeii were typically plastered and whitewashed. To discourage burglars, most houses lacked large ground-level windows, resulting in long, tempting stretches of white surfaces. These expanses were exploited by a wide spectrum of people who painted or incised messages ranging from the political to the personal.

In addition to this prominent and highly public form of graffiti, the eruption of Vesuvius also preserved more intimate messages on interior walls, a practice that seems to have been especially common in latrines, inns, and brothels.

The density of graffiti along Pompeii's streets has been carefully studied, and it is perhaps no surprise that the most heavily traveled roads also possessed the thickest concentrations of graffiti. The walls that were most densely written upon were those along the thoroughfares that traversed the entire width of the city and led directly to gates in the city's fortified walls. These would have been the roads most used by Pompeians, but also by visitors to the city and those simply passing through. The writers of graffiti clearly preferred to leave their messages in places where the greatest numbers of people would read them.

Pompeiiian graffiti is so pervasive that the city's inhabitants seem to have viewed the walls lining the streets as a kind of public advertisement space. Indeed, one large category of graffiti is composed of the type of slogans that we might find today on advertising billboards. There was even a class of professional sign painters who could be hired to inscribe commercial or political messages on walls; their work is usually larger in size and more grammatically correct than the other writings on the walls.

One such professional graffiti writer was a man named Aemilius Celer, who apparently took such pride in his work that he often signed it. His writings show that he was hired to advertise events and businesses as well as to scrawl political slogans and exhortations to elect a particular candidate. Celer even marked his own home with the simple inscription "Aemilius Celer lives here."

Commercial and Political Graffiti

Much graffiti was related to commercial activity. It appears to have been common practice to advertise rooms for rent by painting a sign on the wall. One example for upscale property states, "For Rent: The Arrius Pollio apartment building owned by Gnaeus Allius Nigidius Maius. Street-front shops with counter space, luxury second-story apartments, and a townhouse available beginning July 1. Interested parties should contact Primus, the slave of Gnaeus Allius Nigidius Maius."

Hotels boasted of their facilities to passers-by, as did one inn in Pompeii whose exterior wall bore the inscription "To Rent: rooms including a *triclinium*, three couches, and all amenities."

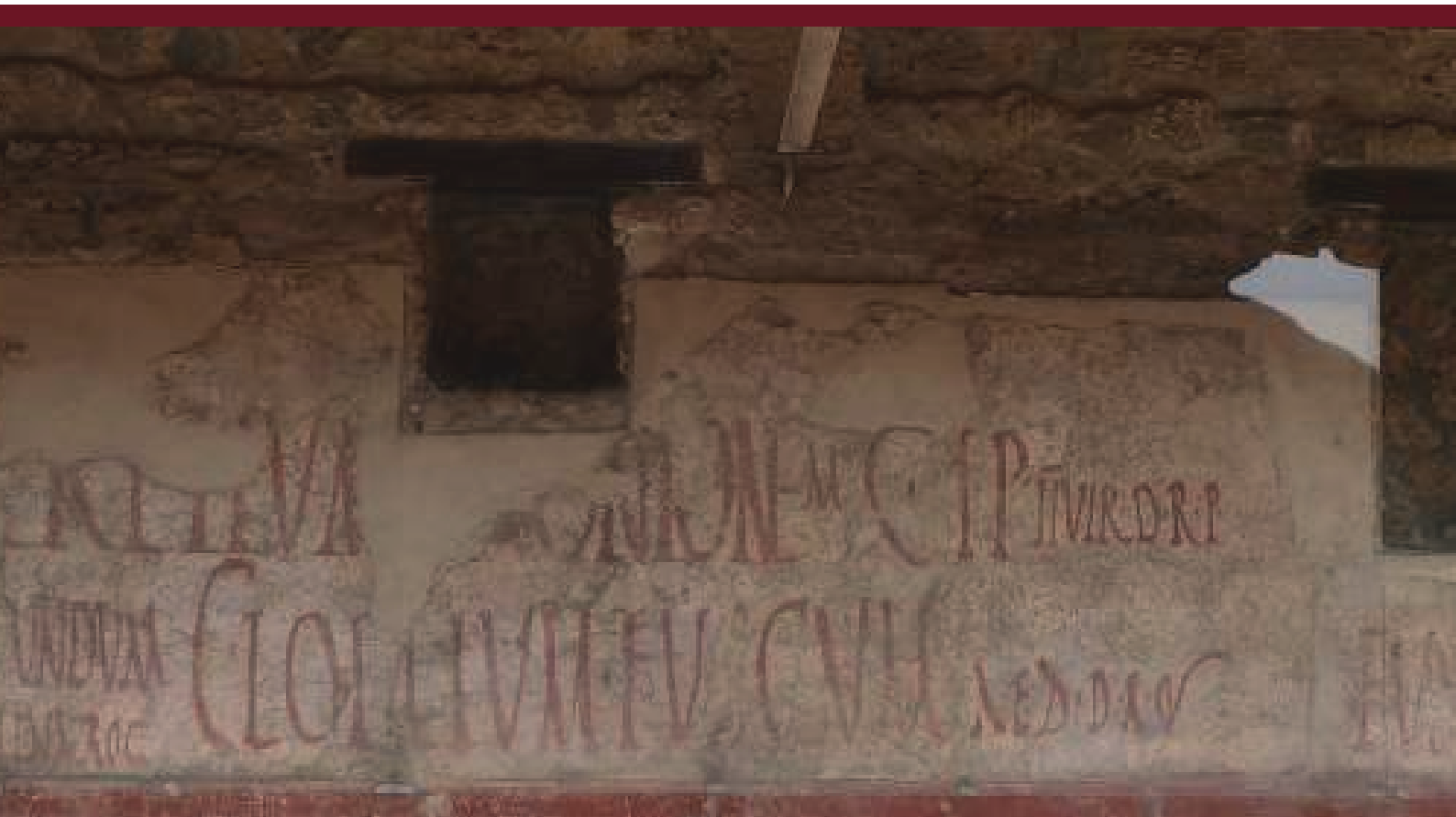
In taverns, the available drinks might be listed on the walls: "Hedone declares: You can get a drink here for one *as* [a type of coin]. You can get a better drink for two *asses*. With four *asses* you can drink Falernian wine [a wine famous for its quality]."

Those who imbibed at such establishments were not always pleased with the quality of the fare that they were served, and some disgruntled guests recorded their displeasure on the walls: "Oh Innkeeper, I hope that your cheating ways will catch up with you. You sell us water, and drink the pure wine yourself."

More than 1,500 instances of graffiti concerning political campaigns have been found at Pompeii, and these offer a glimpse into the workings of Roman politics at the local level. Candidates or their backers would hire men like the sign-painter Celer to cover the walls with slogans praising a candidate's virtues or urging the citizens to vote for him: "If honest living is thought to be any recommendation, then Lucretius Fronto is worthy of being elected." Some election slogans target specific groups: "Innkeepers, make Sallustius Capito aedile." Some graffiti offer personal recommendations of candidates, such as "Magonius supports Cuspius Pansa for aedile."

The most common type of electoral graffiti, however, expressed the endorsement of candidates by special interest groups. Frequently, these were associations composed of people who shared the same profession: "The chicken vendors request that you elect Epidius and Suettius as *duovirs*." Among groups expressing various political opinions were the fruit vendors, grape pickers, fishermen, farmers, goldsmiths, carpenters, cloth dyers, fullers, perfume makers, millers, bakers, barbers, and porters.

Pompeii's electoral graffiti even supply a glimpse of the dirty tactics that some politicians might employ. One strategy was to slander your opponent by putting up graffiti that appeared to offer endorsements of him by undesirable groups. The enemies of a man named Vatia seem to have been particularly fond of this tactic, painting a number of such notices, including "All the drunkards ask you to elect Marcus Cerrinius Vatia aedile."



Another type of message aimed at the general public was lost-and-found notices. One reads: “A copper pot was stolen from this shop. I will give a reward of 65 sesterces for its return and a reward of 20 sesterces for information that leads to its recovery.”

Others memorialize household events: “A daughter was born to us early on the evening of Saturday, August 2.” Some homeowners put warnings on their walls, such as “Burglars beware” and “Do not loiter here. Move along, idlers.”

From such inscriptions, we get a sense of the activities and concerns of ordinary ancient Pompeians and a glimpse at the kind of everyday history that was rarely included in the narratives written by Roman elites.

Personal Graffiti

While much of Pompeii’s graffiti provided announcements, advertisements, information, and endorsements aimed at the general public, like today, a substantial proportion simply represented the spontaneous and often highly personal comments of individuals.

There are numerous variations on the timeless theme of “So-and-so was here,” such as “Aufidius was here.” Bored idlers amused themselves by scratching messages on the walls, such as “Publius Comicius Restitutus stood here with his brother.” Lonely travelers recorded their feelings on the walls, as in a graffito written on the walls of an inn that reads, “Vibius Restitutus slept here alone with his heart filled with longing for his Urbana.”

One vast subcategory of graffiti tells of success or failure at love, such as “Marcus loves Spendusa,” “Atimetus got me pregnant,” and “I came here. I had sex. I returned home.”

Unfortunately, like today, many writers of graffiti used the walls to express, often in vulgar terms, their feelings of resentment or anger, and no small amount of Pompeii’s graffiti consists of short messages like “Ampliatius Pedania is a thief,” “Stronnius is an idiot,” “Serena hates Isidore,” and “From Samius to Cornelius: Go hang yourself!”

There was apparently a fierce sense of competition between Pompeii and neighboring towns, among them Nuceria, especially in athletic contests, and this rivalry has found its way onto the walls with expressions like “Down

with the Nuceria.” A fan of the opposing faction managed to leave his mark on Pompeii’s walls as well: “Good luck to Puteoli! Good luck to all of Nuceria! To hell with Pompeii and Pithecusa!”

Graffiti allowed even children a voice, judging by the many examples inscribed at a child’s eye level. Often consisting of quotes from Virgil and including the occasional complaint about cruel teachers, many of these seem to have been written by students practicing their lessons.

The walls also offered a forum for the musings of street philosophers: “Let he who loves prosper. Let he who loves not, be destroyed. And let he who prevents others from loving be doubly destroyed.”

READINGS

Baird and Taylor, eds., *Ancient Graffiti in Context*.

Keegan, *Graffiti in Antiquity*.

Milnor, *Graffiti and the Literary Landscape in Roman Pompeii*.

QUESTIONS

1. Based on the graffiti from Pompeii, what were the main concerns and worries of the city’s inhabitants? What sorts of things do not appear in the graffiti that you think were nevertheless important to the average Pompeian?
2. How do you assess the historical value of sources written by ordinary people, such as graffiti, compared to traditional upper-class literary sources? What are the advantages, disadvantages, and dangers of relying on each?

While most ancient Roman historians were only interested in the thoughts of the upper classes, Pompeii’s graffiti is exciting to us today precisely because it records the aspirations and feelings of the vast majority of society, who were neither wealthy nor powerful. This graffiti has also been especially helpful to historians by providing information about many concrete details of the practical aspects of daily life that do not appear in upper-class sources.



FINAL WORDS: BURIAL AND TOMBSTONE EPITAPHS

LECTURE 11

Romans had enormous reverence for their ancestors, who were the focal point of family rituals, so death and burial were subjects of great concern to the Romans. However, as with many other aspects of existence in the ancient world, when Romans died, the fate of their bodies was dependent on their economic status. The very poorest Romans sometimes received no burial and were simply tossed into open pits just outside the city walls called *puticuli*, which held a mixture of human and animal corpses, garbage, and excrement. Anyone who could afford to joined a burial club. The usual entry fee was about 100 sesterces, and there were monthly dues. If a member of the club died, the others would pay for the funeral expenses.

Tombs and Funerals

Only the truly wealthy could afford to have individual tombs built for themselves. These tombs were constructed along the roads leading into Rome; thus, to reach the city of the living, you had to first pass through the city of the dead.

One of the most famous tombs, which can still be seen today, is that of Gaius Cestius, who had his tomb erected in the form of a marble pyramid 60 feet high.

Tombs took many forms and were frequently very elaborate. Perhaps the most common type resembled miniature marble houses. Others were shaped like columns, towers, or cones. Tombs often had pipes protruding out the top of them. The idea was that the family would have a picnic on the tomb and would share the feast with the deceased by dropping food and pouring wine down the tube.

It was traditional that rather than building your tomb yourself, your heir would construct it. To ensure that heirs built a suitably impressive structure, many wills contained detailed directions for the type of tomb the person wanted. It was often stipulated that the heir could not receive his or her inheritance until he or she had buried the deceased in the specified manner.

Many heirs likely resented having to expend such effort and money on these monuments, and as a small consolation, they would include their own names on the monuments. In more than a quarter of the monuments excavated, the name of the commemorator who built it is given more prominence than the name of the deceased.

Because standard Roman religious beliefs did not include a well-developed notion of an afterlife, Romans seemed particularly anxious to leave some enduring memory of themselves behind. Elaborate tombs were one way to do this. Demands placed on your descendants—that they celebrate a feast on your tomb—were another. Some Romans tried to make sure that they would be remembered by setting up funds of money, the interest from which was to be employed for certain activities, such as an annual feast for the people of his or her hometown.

Despite all the effort that went into leaving an enduring legacy, many of these attempts were in vain. Tombs were often sold, and their valuable marble was reused. Poor people and the homeless broke into mausoleums, threw out the corpses, and used them as dwellings.

Many Christian churches plundered Roman cemeteries for building materials, and the reason why many Roman funerary inscriptions survive today is because they were built into the walls of churches.

Even the Romans sometimes seem to have shown little reverence for their own tombs. The public toilets in the town of Ostia were constructed out of old tombstones.



Among wealthy Romans, the installation of a deceased man or woman's remains into a tomb could be accompanied by considerable ceremony. The deceased was dressed in fine clothing, and a wreath was placed on the head. A solemn parade processed from his or her house to the forum. Family, friends, and clients all marched in this. The wax death masks of illustrious ancestors were placed on current family members, who also dressed up in clothing indicating the highest rank that the individual had attained.

When they reached the forum, those impersonating the ancestors would sit down on a row of ivory chairs placed on the rostra, the speaker's platform. The corpse was also placed on the rostra and propped upright. One of the sons or another close family member would deliver a eulogy, in which he or she recounted the deeds of the deceased. The procession then traveled outside the city boundaries, where the corpse was usually cremated.

During the funeral procession, close female relatives were expected to scream, beat themselves, tear out their hair, scratch their cheeks until they bled, roll on the ground, and pound their heads against the ground. The family also hired musicians—and sometimes also professional mourners. Some funerary ceremonies were becoming such ostentatious spectacles that on several occasions, laws were passed attempting to limit how much could be spent on them.

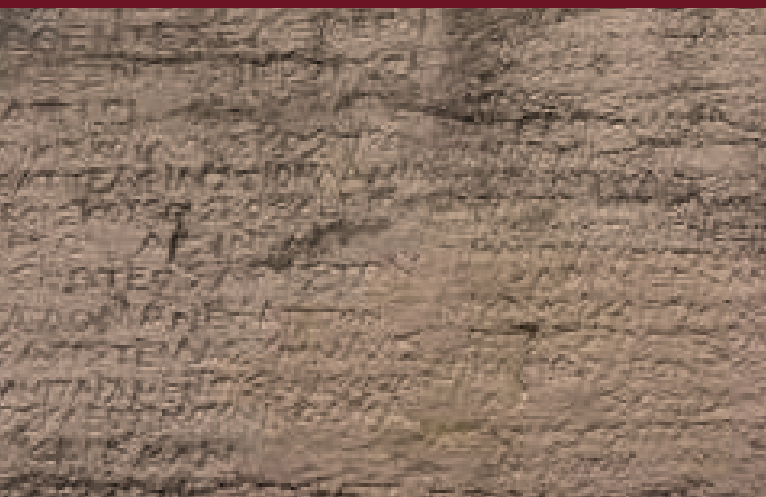
Roman Wills

Romans were very concerned with leaving their property to the desired person. About 20 percent of surviving Roman legal writings are about wills and what made them valid.

The main purpose of a will was to designate somebody as the heir. This is different from modern wills, in which the main purpose is to distribute property. The heir not only inherited all or most of someone's property, but also almost assumed the testator's identity and status. Thus, the oldest son was normally made the heir. The first duty of the heir was to see to the funeral of the deceased.

An heir not only acquired the property and the rights of the testator, but also inherited any debts. This did not mean that debts were paid out of the estate and the heir got what was left over, if anything. Instead, the heir was now legally responsible for the deceased's debts, even if these exceeded the value of the inheritance.

The first line of a will was always the designation of the heir. To be valid, a will had to name an heir, disinherit anyone who might be eligible, and be written at a special ceremony with seven witnesses observing. The witnesses had to be adult males and could be neither blind nor insane. Another very common part of a will was the posthumous manumission, or freeing of the testator's favorite slave or slaves.



If you really hated someone, in your will you could leave the person a legacy of a rope and a nail; the message was that the individual should tie the rope to the nail and then hang him- or herself from it.

Tombstone Epitaphs

Funerary inscriptions are another source that provides insight into the lives of ordinary Romans. One's tombstone both represents one's final chance to make a statement to the people of the present and holds the possibility of speaking to people of the future.

Today, most tombstones only include very simple epitaphs. Fortunately for historians, however, ancient Roman tombstones are much more descriptive and often feature lengthy epitaphs. These might describe the deceased person's life and his or her achievements or personality, offer bits of philosophy, or record a message that he or she wished to leave for posterity. Collectively, these funerary inscriptions preserve data about the lives, achievements, and aspirations of average Romans, which would otherwise be lost to history.

Also, tombstones were not limited to the wealthiest Romans but rather span a broad spectrum of Roman society, from the most powerful aristocrats to the humblest artisans. Thus, we can read the epitaphs of people elected to the highest offices in government and the military, but we can also learn about simple craftsmen, merchants, and even slaves. Some tombstones preserve the careers of public entertainers, such as gladiators and charioteers.

Funerary inscriptions reveal that many women worked, among them a number who were doctors. Other interesting professions attested on women's tombstones include scribe, merchant, and actress. The epitaphs of men also illustrate an enormous variety of jobs, from humble laborers to those with more specialized careers, such as slaughterers of animals for sacrifices.

An aspect of life that tombstones bring to light is the strong emotions that tied together spouses, family members, and friends. While some funerary inscriptions emphasize the deep passion that existed between some couples, others are more restrained, although still listing qualities that one partner found congenial in the other. Modesty and the ability to sew are among the most common positive attributes ascribed to women by their husbands.

One grave marker records a husband's grief over his young wife's death: "To the eternal memory of Blandina Martiola, a most blameless girl, who lived eighteen years, nine months, five days. Pompeius Catussa, a Sequanian citizen and a plasterer, dedicates this monument to his wife, who was incomparable and very kind to him. She lived with him five years, six months, eighteen days without any shadow of a fault. You who read this, go bathe in the baths of Apollo as I used to do with my wife. I wish I still could."

In addition to the touching detail about the couple's favorite baths, this inscription illustrates the early ages at which some women were married, because the couple had apparently lived together since she was only 13.



Some Romans seemed more concerned with ensuring that their bodies would lie undisturbed in their graves after death than with recording their accomplishments while alive. An inscription of this type states, “Gaius Tullius Hesper had this tomb built for himself, as a place where his bones might be laid. If anyone damages them or removes them from here, may he live in great physical pain for a long time, and when he dies, may the gods of the underworld deny entrance to his spirit.”

Because graves were situated along the roads leading into cities, some people chose to use their tombstones to give advice to those passing by or simply to express their beliefs. One man erected a monument that declared: “To the spirits of the departed. Titus Flavius Martialis lies here. What I ate and drank is with me here, what I left behind is gone forever.” Some stones offer comments that perhaps preserve something of their authors’ temperaments. One terse inscription states, “I was not. I was. I am not. I care not.”

Epitaphs and Sources for Ordinary Romans

As with graffiti, funerary epitaphs provide us with knowledge about facets of Roman society that would otherwise have been lost and thus have proven to be a rich resource. For economic historians, tombstones convey information about the range of professions and the types of employment available to ancient Romans. Other historians have performed statistical analyses to discern patterns of mortality and to extrapolate information about life expectancy.

But perhaps one of the greatest contributions of tombstones is the manner in which they record the actual feelings of individuals and demonstrate the universality of basic emotions, such as love, hate, jealousy, and pride.

Tombstones even preserve one of the most complicated yet subtle characteristics of human beings: our love of humor. Many of the messages were plainly drafted to amuse and entertain the reader, and the fact that some of them can still do so after 2,000 years is surely one of the most remarkable aspects of this extraordinary body of evidence.

READINGS

Hope, *Death in Ancient Rome*.

———, *Roman Death*.

Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World*.

QUESTIONS

1. Compare the Roman tombstone epitaphs in this lecture with those found in modern cemeteries. What kinds of information did the Romans think was most important to include? Least important?
2. If you were to compose a Roman-style tombstone for yourself, what would it say?

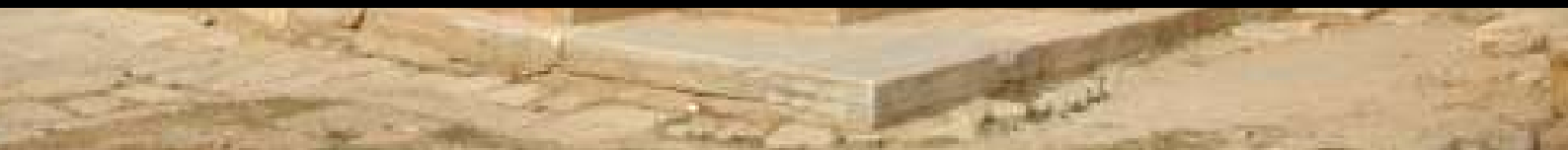
Every source that survives from the ancient world is an exception, because for each one that we can read today, thousands have been forever lost. Chance plays an enormous role in shaping our understanding of antiquity, because the processes that have determined which sources survive and which are destroyed are largely random. We can only hope that the ones that have come down to us are at least somewhat representative of the many others that did not and thus can offer us a window into the lives of their authors.

While famous works of literature and philosophy tend to reflect the perspective of elites, there are some types of surviving written records that give insights into the lives of ordinary people. In addition to graffiti and tombstones, there are also personal letters, legal records, census data, military discharge diplomas, recipes, medical records, and sales receipts, as well as physical objects, such as pottery, tools, and jewelry. Collectively, these sources offer a rare but precious perspective on the lives, hopes, fears, and dreams of the vast—but usually silent—majority of ordinary people who lived in the Roman world.



FROM COMMODUS TO CARACALLA

LECTURE 12



The death of Marcus Aurelius in AD 180 brought to an end what is conventionally regarded as the golden age of Rome. He was the last of the so-called five good emperors, who had deviated from the earlier policy of picking the nearest male relative to be the next emperor and instead had chosen the best-qualified person. The result was that, for an 84-year stretch, there had been only five emperors. All of them had been wise and conscientious rulers, and the Roman Empire had enjoyed relative stability, prosperity, and security. Over the next century, however, all of those positive factors would be dramatically inverted. The empire would suffer near-constant political chaos and widespread economic collapse and would be battered by waves of marauding barbarians and attacks by dangerous rival empires.

Emperor Commodus

The decision that set Rome on this downward slide was that, when it came time to designate a successor, the otherwise-sagacious philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius foolishly selected his own teenage son, Commodus.

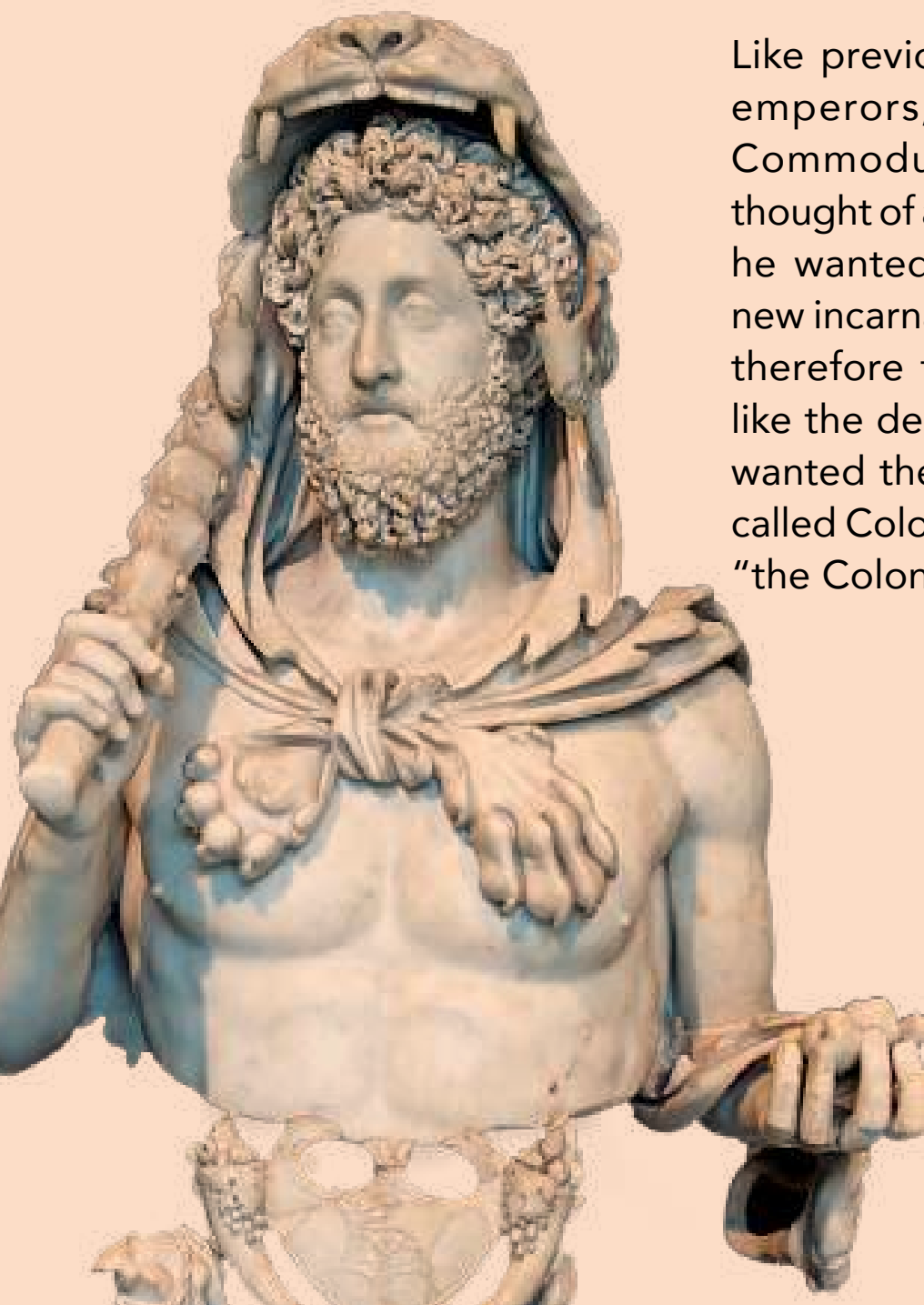
Marcus had tried to prepare Commodus to rule, providing him with an excellent education and appointing him to a number of important posts even as a youth. Unfortunately, Commodus simply did not have the personality to be a good emperor. In the words of one ancient source, he was “immoral, shameless, cruel, lecherous, and depraved.”

Commodus was also lazy, and, upon becoming emperor, showed little predilection for governing, instead delegating his duties to a series of opportunistic hangers-on who frequently bungled the job and offended the professional administrators.

The lengthy Marcomannic wars fought against groups of Germanic barbarians along the northern frontiers that had absorbed so much of his father's time and attention held no interest for Commodus, so they were brought to an ignominious conclusion through a hastily concluded treaty and the decision to abandon outright the attempt to carve out new provinces in the north.

This left Commodus free to indulge his passions, and he had distinctly theatrical inclinations. He fancied himself a mighty gladiator and an expert hunter of wild beasts, and he frequently appeared at public entertainments in these roles.

While he delighted in mocking and even murdering senators, he craved the adulation of the masses of Rome and showered the people with benefactions. In addition to sponsoring frequent lavish public entertainments, he periodically gave sizable distributions of cash to all citizens in the city.



Like previous megalomaniacal emperors, such as Nero, Commodus aspired to be thought of as a god. In particular, he wanted to be viewed as a new incarnation of Hercules and therefore took to dressing up like the deified Greek hero. He wanted the city of Rome to be called Colonia Commodiana, or "the Colony of Commodus."

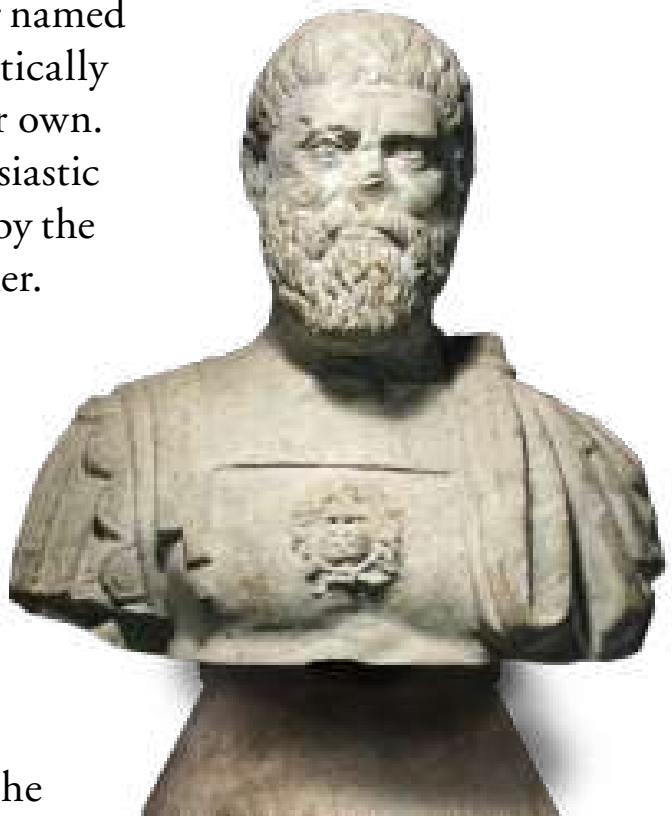
During Commodus's reign, there was much internal scheming by a number of power-hungry individuals who tried to take advantage of his preoccupation with his own hobbies to become the real power behind the throne. These included several Praetorian prefects who rose to prominence only to end up being lynched or executed when they incurred the disfavor of either Commodus or the people of Rome.

Despite his behavior, Commodus ruled for quite a long time, finally being assassinated on the last day of AD 192. He met his end when his own mistress, his chamberlain, and the Praetorian prefect joined forces to kill him—because they feared that Commodus was planning to have all of them killed.

Pertinax and Didius Julianus

To replace Commodus, his assassins turned to an elderly and well-connected senator named Pertinax, and the senate enthusiastically endorsed the elevation of one of their own. The Praetorian Guard was less enthusiastic but were persuaded to back Pertinax by the promise of 12,000 sesterces per soldier.

Pertinax energetically threw himself into the job, attempting to undo some of the financial damage caused by Commodus's extravagances. Pertinax slashed government expenditures, sold government offices to raise cash, auctioned off Commodus's property, restored the purity of the coinage that had been undermined by Commodus, tried to rein in the power of the Praetorians, and pledged that he would be respectful of the senate.



This was an ambitious program, but unfortunately for Pertinax, it resulted in alienating almost everyone. The senators resented the selling of magistracies, the people missed the grandiose spectacles and gifts bestowed on them by Commodus, and—most problematically—the Praetorians begrudged any attempt to curb their influence.

After less than three months as emperor, Pertinax was slashed to death in March of AD 193 by a group of Praetorians who stormed the palace.

The Praetorians seem to have acted without much thought about what would come next but decided to take advantage of the situation to enrich themselves. What followed was one of the most shameful episodes in all of Roman history: In essence, the Praetorian Guard sold the Roman Empire to the highest bidder. The winner was Didius Julianus, who promised them 25,000 sesterces per man, or roughly the equivalent of 25 years' salary for an ordinary Roman legionary. But just 66 days later, he, too, was murdered by a Praetorian.

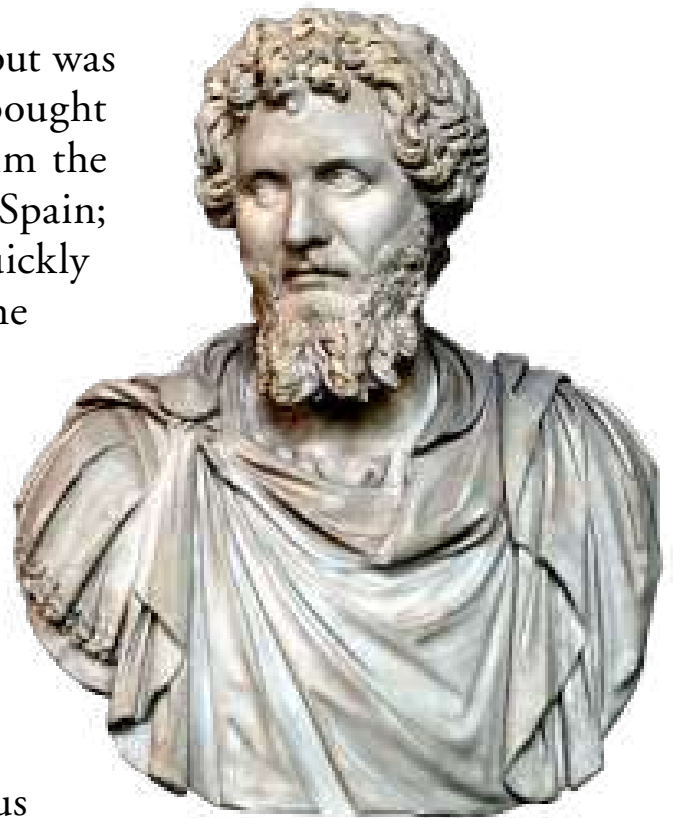
In reality, it was the troops who held power—who could make or break emperors. During the next century, as people came to realize this fact, more and more emperors would gain the throne through military force.



Septimius Severus

Meanwhile, seeing that soldiers had the power to make emperors, the legions in the provinces decided to get in on the action as well. Independently, the legions posted in Syria, Britain, and along the Danube River each acclaimed their own commander as emperor. The new set of candidates for the throne were Clodius Albinus in Britain with the support of three legions, Pescennius Niger in the east with 10 legions, and Septimius Severus on the Danube with 16 legions.

Severus not only had the largest army but was also the most able of the three. He bought the support of Albinus by declaring him the Caesar in charge of Britain, Gaul, and Spain; then, Severus marched to Italy and quickly took possession of Rome. There, he neutralized the Praetorian Guard by dismissing the current members and replacing them with handpicked legionaries from his own troops. He also stationed an entire new regular legion in Italy, which had not been allowed previously.



The dynamic Severus then pivoted his forces to the east and attacked Pescennius Niger. A series of bloody battles followed.

By AD 195, the armies of Niger and his allies had been defeated, and Niger was slain while trying to flee to the neighboring eastern empire of Parthia.

The Parthians had long been foes of Rome, and the warlike Severus apparently decided that, because his army was in the area, he might as well attack them, too. After a brief campaign against Parthia, Severus was compelled to return to the west to deal with Albinus, who had merely been waiting for an opportune moment to turn against Severus. Albinus's army was decisively crushed in 197 at a battle at Lugdunum in Gaul, the city of Lugdunum (now Lyon) was brutally looted and burned, and Albinus committed suicide.

With both his Roman rivals vanquished, Severus immediately resumed the war against Parthia, invading the eastern empire and sacking its capital city of Ctesiphon. He annexed part of the Parthian territory, forming it into the province of Mesopotamia. He also reorganized other eastern provinces, adding bits onto Arabia and splitting Syria into two provinces.

Septimius Severus was the first of what are sometimes called the soldier emperors, or the barracks emperors—men who became emperor neither through adoption nor selection by the senate but simply because they could command the most troops. Most commonly, they were provincial governors of those frontier provinces that faced dangerous barbarians and therefore had large armies under their control.

Severus's eastern victories received monumental commemoration at Rome in the form of the Arch of Septimius Severus, erected in the Roman Forum. It is 75 feet tall and 82 feet wide, was surmounted by a gilded bronze statue of Severus and his sons in a chariot, and is one of only three surviving triumphal arches at Rome.



In his policies, Severus heavily favored the original source of his power, the military. He increased the number of legions to 33, raised the pay of ordinary legionaries by a third, and gave additional benefits to veterans. Administratively, he promoted the advancement of provincials and equestrians and tried to enforce fiscal restraint, which resulted in a positive balance in the treasury. His style as an emperor was stern and practical.



Severus's wife, Julia Domna, was a particularly active empress. In fact, her role as an advisor to her husband may be reflected in the unusual degree of prominence she is given on coins minted during Severus's reign and in imperial inscriptions on monuments.

One problematic area, however, was yet again the question of succession. Julia had presented him with two sons: Caracalla, the older one, and a younger boy named Geta. He hoped to pass on the empire to his sons jointly, but the boys did not get along well. Julia's favorite was Geta, who seems to have been the more even-tempered of the two, but Caracalla was the elder and more unscrupulous.

When another war broke out in AD 208 in Britain, despite his age, Severus decided once again to take personal command of the campaign and to bring his entire family with him. It proved too much, however, and he fell ill and then died in Britain in AD 211.

Like "Caligula," the name "Caracalla" is actually a nickname, derived from a particular type of Gallic cloak that Caracalla habitually wore.

Caracalla and Macrinus

Caracalla and Geta became joint emperors, but their mutual animosity made it an extremely tense situation. They returned to Rome and held funeral ceremonies for their father, and then they each retreated into different parts of the palace and set up rival courts. They debated dividing up the empire between them but could not agree on terms. Soon, Caracalla was actively plotting to kill his brother, and by the end of the year, he attained his aim.



Promptly after Geta's death, Caracalla embarked on a bloody purge, slaughtering anyone remotely associated with his despised brother. More than 10,000 people allegedly fell victim to Caracalla's wrath. Caracalla officially condemned the memory of Geta and ordered that his name be erased from all records and that all images of him be destroyed.

As emperor, Caracalla displayed some of the same performative proclivities as Commodus—he enjoyed killing wild beasts and driving chariots—but he usually managed to limit these activities to private displays. He increased the soldiers' pay yet again, which pleased the troops but caused serious financial problems.



Apparently seeking to enhance his reputation with military glory, Caracalla campaigned for several years along the German frontier, where he achieved some successes and substantially strengthened the fortifications guarding the border. He then turned his attention to the east and undertook yet another expedition against the Parthians. Caracalla seems to have been fascinated by the exploits of Alexander the Great and sought to emulate his eastern conquests, but Caracalla's Parthian campaign achieved little.

In AD 217, while traveling to Edessa, Caracalla was stabbed to death. The killer had been acting on the orders of the Praetorian prefect, Macrinus; once again, we see the emperor's supposed bodyguards being responsible for his murder.

READINGS

Birley, *Septimius Severus*.

Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*.

Toner, *The Day Commodus Killed a Rhino*.

QUESTIONS

1. Emperors such as Commodus, Septimius Severus, Didianus Julianus, and Caracalla are not as well known as those of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. Do you think this is due to their actions being less important or less memorable because of the politically confused nature of the times, because the empire seemed to be in decline, or for some other reason?
2. Given the circumstances existing in the Roman Empire in AD 211, in your opinion, how sound or appropriate was Septimius Severus's deathbed advice to his sons ("Enrich the soldiers and despise everyone else")?

Macrinus became emperor, but he was in a tenuous position. He was the first emperor not to hold senatorial rank; he was merely of equestrian status. This would not have endeared him to the senate, and he then alienated the army by curtailing their pay. He also negotiated a disadvantageous peace treaty with the Parthians, which the troops found humiliating.

Furthermore, powerful foes were plotting against Macrinus. Severus's wife, Julia Domna, had died, but her sister, Julia Maesa, was seeking to restore her family to power. Caracalla had been popular among the army, so she spread a rumor that her 14-year-old grandson had actually been fathered by Caracalla, and along with a little bribery, this won their support for her grandson.

Macrinus was swiftly killed, and Rome had another teenage ruler. As emperor, he would be known as Elagabalus, and he would turn out to be among the most depraved of all Rome's sovereigns.



THE CRISIS OF THE 3RD CENTURY

LECTURE 13

If the reigns of megalomaniacal emperors such as Commodus and Caracalla in the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries AD had seemed a bad time for the Roman Empire, things were about to get much, much worse. By the midpoint of the 3rd century, the empire appeared to be irretrievably spiraling down into total collapse, with the economy in shambles, incessant civil war and political chaos, entire chunks of the empire breaking away, and hordes of barbarians storming unchecked across the borders. The catastrophes rampant in this century were all the more vivid because they conflicted glaringly with the preceding century, which had been characterized as a golden age.

Elagabalus

In between the low points of Commodus and Caracalla had been the relative calm of Septimius Severus, who, although a bit hard-nosed, had been an excellent general and a competent administrator. The women in his family had also been unusually assertive. Severus's strong-willed wife, Julia Domna, had died during the brief rule of Macrinus, who had seized control from the Severan family after Caracalla's assassination. However, Julia Domna's sister, Julia Maesa, was cut from the same dynamic cloth and was determined to restore her family to power.

Accordingly, Julia Maesa skillfully gained the allegiance of the troops through generous bribery. However, as a woman, she knew that she could not rule overtly, so she looked for an appropriate male figurehead. She had no sons—only two daughters—but each of her daughters had a son. She selected the elder of these grandsons, a 14-year-old boy who was currently the holder of her family's hereditary high priesthood of the eastern cult of Elagabal, a variant of the sun god.

Upon his accession as emperor, the boy was officially renamed Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, but both his contemporaries and later historians usually refer to him by the Romanized name of his deity, Elagabalus, or sometimes Heliogabalus.



Elagabalus arguably turned out to be the worst Roman emperor of all. He was utterly devoted to his religion and the worship of his god. Even after becoming emperor, Elagabalus would show little interest in government, instead spending much of his time engaged in the ritual offering of sacrifices and elaborate dances in honor of his deity.

Other than worshipping his god, Elagabalus's interests seemed to consist of practicing all manner of perversions and forcing people to perform outrageous acts. In less than four years, he may have officially married as many as six wives, in addition to having innumerable sexual partners of both genders. Elagabalus liked to amuse himself—and abuse his power—by issuing ridiculous orders to his staff, such as that he be presented with 1,000 pounds of spider webs.

Elagabalus enjoyed appointing his personal staff to key positions of power in the government. He made an exotic dancer the head of the Praetorian Guard, appointed as commander of the night watch a charioteer, and selected his favorite hairdresser to be the prefect of the grain supply.

Elagabalus was particularly fond of holding elaborate and outlandish feasts. At one dinner, he served 600 ostrich heads.

Sometimes he would have real food served to himself, while his guests were offered food made out of glass, wood, or stone.

He liked to furnish dinner guests with spoons on which were engraved prizes that they would receive, ranging from the very valuable—such as 10 pounds of gold—to the utterly worthless, such as 10 flies.

There is debate among scholars concerning how much of Elagabalus's sensational behavior recorded by ancient authors can be believed.

When his grandmother, Julia Maesa, recognized that she could not control, or even restrain, his erratic behavior, she realized that his subjects would soon turn against him. But she was still determined to maintain her behind-the-scenes influence, so she turned to her other grandson, Severus Alexander, and cleverly persuaded Elagabalus to adopt his 10-year-old cousin as his heir.

Almost immediately, Elagabalus understood that he had made a fatal error, because the adoption rendered him disposable to the powerful woman who was really running things. It also caused a family rift, with Elagabalus supported by his mother on one side, and Julia Maesa and her other daughter, Julia Mamea, the mother of Severus, on the other. Elagabalus tried to bribe the Praetorians to kill Severus Alexander, but the soldiers were fed up with Elagabalus and disgusted by his excesses, so instead they murdered both him and his mother in AD 222 after a reign of just four years.



Elagabalus has the distinction of being the only emperor whose corpse was hauled through the streets on a hook, dragged through the sewers, and flung into the Tiber River.

The senate responded to Elagabalus's death by invoking *damnatio memoriae*, meaning that he was to be erased from memory. All coins, statues, and portraits of him were to be destroyed, and his name was to be excised from all inscriptions, records, and official documents.

Severus Alexander and Maximinius Thrax

In Severus Alexander, Julia Maesa and Julia Mamea had a much more pliable figurehead to work with. In contrast to Elagabalus, Severus was quiet and studious, and he willingly let himself be guided by his mother, grandmother, and the tutors they chose for him.

Julia Maesa died a few years into Severus's tenure, but Julia Mamea seamlessly continued the family tradition of strong Severan women and acted as the power behind the throne for the next decade. She cultivated good relations with the senate and offered them meaningful collaboration. She also enlisted the assistance of talented Roman legal experts.



While superficially the empire appeared sound, the stability of Severus's 13-year reign turned out to be just a brief pause before things went horribly downhill for Rome. On the northern and eastern borders, new, more dangerous external foes were emerging that would not merely cause trouble for the empire, but would threaten its very existence.

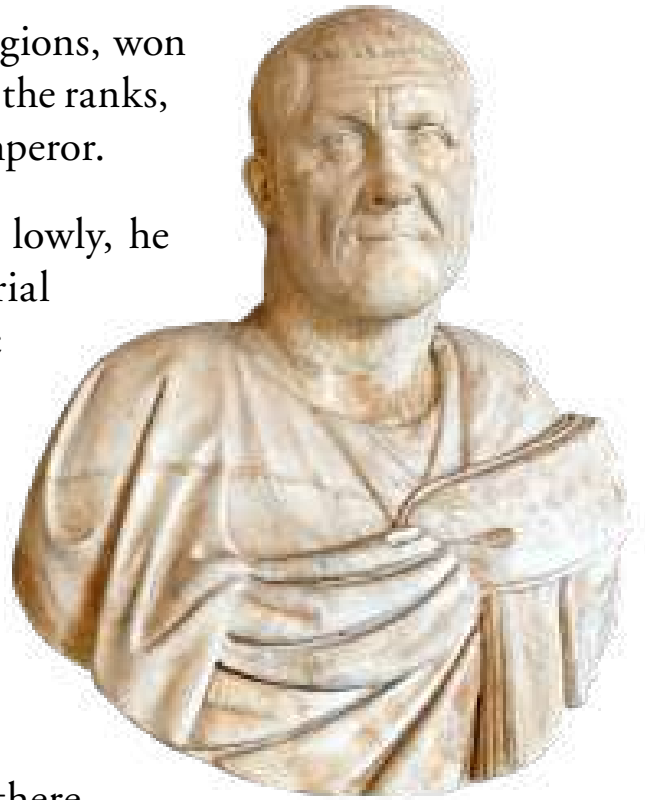
Things began to crumble all around. Severus and Julia soon had to rush to the northern frontier, where Germanic tribes were attacking Gaul and Raetia. Uncertain of military success, they chose to buy off the Germans with a sizable bribe. Paying this large sum to barbarians did not sit well with the soldiers, who had seen their own pay and benefits curtailed.

The legions had long been simmering with discontent, disliking what they perceived as the effeminate behavior of Elagabalus, resenting the power wielded by the Severan women, and finding the meek Severus an uninspiring leader. The Praetorians' support for the later Severan emperors had also been weak; at one point during Severus's reign, they had even openly revolted and killed their own prefect.

In AD 235, the northern legions had had enough and rebelled under the leadership of a junior officer named Maximinus Thrax, who supposedly was a muscular giant. He started life as a simple peasant from the region of

Thrace and then enlisted in the Roman legions, won the favor of his fellow soldiers, rose through the ranks, and eventually had them proclaim him emperor.

Whether or not his origins were truly so lowly, he certainly was not a member of a senatorial family and was despised by the aristocratic senate for what they saw as his near-barbarian birth. He returned their scorn, largely ignoring the senate, raising taxes, increasing the soldiers' pay, and cutting back the grain supply for Rome. He was, however, a very good fighter, and successfully drove back the Germans.



Unsurprisingly, after only three years, there was a revolt against Maximinus, and what followed was a bewildering assortment of wannabe emperors. There were multiple civil wars and assassinations, and Maximinus Thrax was killed, along with nearly all of the imperial candidates. Ultimately, during the single year of AD 238, Rome ran through no fewer than seven different official emperors.

The Disintegration of the Empire

Following the events of AD 238, Roman history entered a chaotic period of instability with an extraordinarily high turnover rate of emperors. This was the era of the soldier emperors, when—as Thrax's career had made clear—the only qualification you needed was the allegiance of many sword-wielding men. Things were so bad during this time that historians have labeled this stretch “the crisis of the 3rd century.” There were several broad systemic problems that contributed to the crisis.

In contrast to the high point of the 2nd century AD, when there were only five rulers of the empire for an 80-year span, there would be at least 26 official emperors over the next 50 years and dozens of others who unsuccessfully tried to seize power.

The empire fell into a cycle of nearly incessant civil war. By this time, most of the legions had become concentrated in just a few provinces that faced the greatest external threats. When the governors of these provinces realized that they controlled a significant percentage of the armed forces, they would persuade or bribe their legions to acclaim them as emperor. Not infrequently, two or more of these regions would simultaneously acclaim a new emperor, leading to a civil war. These wars created terrible political chaos and paralyzed the administration, because no one could be sure who the legitimate emperor was at any given moment.

If a civil war broke out—as constantly happened—and a large percentage of the legions abandoned their posts to fight one another at Rome or elsewhere, nobody was left to guard the border, and the barbarians were quick to take advantage of this and invade Roman territory. Even when one of the contenders for emperor managed to emerge militarily triumphant over his Roman rivals, he then had to deal with the barbarian threat, often leading to a depleted and exhausted army.

Since the time of Augustus, the size of the army had steadily been increased and the pay of soldiers had been raised, but this had reached an unsustainable point where the empire simply could no longer support its military. An economic system already stretched to its limit was then further stressed by the devastation accompanying all the internal and external warfare, leading to the creation of a vicious circle.

The reeling empire was hit by a flurry of natural disasters. Severe earthquakes wrought devastation both in Italy and in the east, and there was another outbreak of plague that rampaged up and down the length of the empire for more than a decade, killing millions, particularly in the large cities. The depopulation caused by this plague not only harmed the economy by lowering productivity but may also have contributed to serious manpower shortages, which made it more difficult to muster the troops needed to fight off the barbarians.

Technological limitations on communication revealed that the empire had grown too large to be run effectively by one person. There had already been a tendency for the empire to split into eastern and western sections, and geographic rivalries had contributed to the readiness of legionaries from different regions to proclaim their own officers as emperor.

Under the collective weight of all these pressures, the empire began disintegrating—as local rulers realized the impotence of Rome to punish them and entire chunks of the empire started to break away, forming their own states.

READINGS

de Arrizabalaga y Prado, *The Emperor Elagabalus*.

Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*.

Southern, *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you think there is a connection between the chaos of the times and the fact that this era seems to have had an unusual number of women—such as Julia Mamea, Julia Maesa, and Zenobia—who were able to wield power in a way that women typically were not allowed to do in the ancient world?
2. What steps could the Romans realistically have taken to avoid or ameliorate the major problems that struck the empire during the crisis of the 3rd century, or were the problems inevitable?

Beset by vigorous external foes, riven by constant internal strife, battered by disease and depopulation, and staggering beneath a failing economy, the Roman Empire seemed to be at its end in the late 260s. This story has a surprising plot twist, however. Just when things seemed darkest, there arrived on the scene a series of tough military emperors who managed to stabilize the empire and granted it at least another hundred years of life.



DIOCLETIAN AND LATE 3RD-CENTURY REFORMS

LECTURE 14

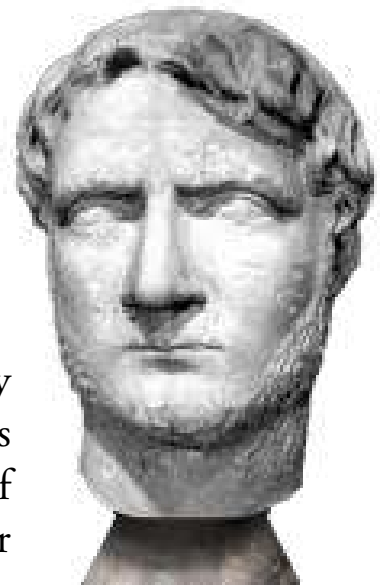
By the late 260s AD, the end appeared to have come for the Roman Empire. The elements that made up the so-called crisis of the 3rd century—constant civil war, political instability, incessant barbarian attacks, natural disasters, and widespread economic collapse—seemed to be too much for Rome to cope with, and the empire tottered on the edge of complete dissolution. At this dark moment, however, there appeared a sequence of hard-bitten soldier emperors who managed to arrest Rome's fall and to stabilize the reeling empire.

The Turning Point: Gallienus and Claudius Gothicus

The emperor Gallienus, who ruled from AD 260 to 268, probably began the process of stabilizing the empire, but in the surviving sources, it is often difficult to separate the reforms he initiated from those of the slightly later emperors, whose actions are better attested and more lasting.

Toward the end of Gallienus's reign, there was an especially large incursion of Goths and other Germanic barbarians who swept down from the Black Sea region in a fleet of hundreds of ships and with a land army said to number in the hundreds of thousands. A group known as the Heruli rampaged deep into Roman territory, penetrating through Thessaly and down into central and southern Greece. Numerous Greek cities, including Sparta and Athens, were captured and savagely looted.

The emperor Gallienus eventually arrived and defeated the Heruli in a pitched battle, but he was then assassinated by his own staff. The reign of his successor, Claudius II, while brief, marks a turning point in the crisis of the 3rd century. Claudius picked up where Gallienus left off, winning a decisive victory over the Goths in AD 269 at Naissus, in modern Serbia, and then followed up that triumph by inflicting a solid defeat on the Alemanni at Lake Benacus in northern Italy.



Such was the scale of these twin victories that the Balkan frontier was restored and secured, at least for a while. In commemoration of his accomplishment, Claudius acquired the surname Gothicus, meaning “conqueror of the Goths.” Unfortunately, he did not get to enjoy his accolades for long, because the next year Claudius Gothicus caught the plague and died.

Aurelian, Restorer of the World

Luckily for Rome, however, the string of competent generals becoming emperor that had started with Gallienus continued with the next man: yet another Roman general from the Illyrian frontier, Aurelian.

Aurelian took an objective look at the condition of the empire, the many barbarian threats coming from the north, and the available military resources and made the difficult but practical decision to abandon the province of Dacia. He pulled back the Roman forces that had been occupying that region since Trajan had conquered it more than a hundred years earlier and established a new frontier along the more defensible line of the Danube River.



By the early 1st century AD, the built-up part of the city of Rome had grown considerably beyond its original walls, but no new fortifications had ever been erected. Between AD 271 and 275, under Aurelian's direction, Rome was enclosed within a new circuit of mighty walls, known as the Aurelian Walls.

Today, extensive segments of the Aurelian Walls are still visible and quite well preserved.



Aurelian threw himself with great energy and skill into addressing the most pressing threats and securing the frontiers. His martial success at these endeavors earned him the nickname “Manus ad Ferrum,” meaning “Hand on Iron” or “Hand on Sword.” He began by reconquering Egypt and the other eastern province that had been lost to the dynamic Queen Zenobia and her Palmyrene empire. He also took Palmyra itself and captured Zenobia, who was taken back to Rome to be displayed in the triumph that he celebrated for his victories.



Aurelian actively encouraged worship of the sun god, but in a form more palatable to Romans than the somewhat suspicious eastern manifestation of Elagabalus.

Aurelian seems to have had the idea that in a time of crisis, it could strengthen the empire if everyone worshipped the same god. While not strictly advocating a form of monotheism, he was leaning in that direction and thus was a sort of precursor to the emperor Constantine, who saw the potential for monotheistic Christianity to function in the same way.

Having settled the east, Aurelian next turned to the breakaway Gallic empire established by Postumus and now ruled by Tetricus. Aurelian had momentum and the necessary military force on his side, so rather than offering opposition, Tetricus was persuaded to surrender. Aurelian thereby conquered the lost provinces in Gaul, Spain, and Britain and brought them, too, back into the fold.



In less than five years, Aurelian had accomplished an amazing achievement: He had almost completely reconstituted the Roman Empire, which previously had seemed to be irretrievably shattered. For this, he earned the well-deserved title “Restitutor Orbis,” or “Restorer of the World.”

One problem that Aurelian could not find a solution for was the perilous state of Rome’s economy. Inflation had caused prices to rise by a factor of eight between AD 267 and 274, and his efforts to fix this were not fully successful.

Despite Aurelian’s accomplishments, there was still jealousy and plotting within the ranks of the military leadership, and in AD 275, Aurelian was assassinated by a group of his own officers.

For most of the next decade, things seemed to be backsliding, with a succession of emperors who ruled only briefly before being killed. Among the rulers who came and went in this period were Tacitus, Probus, Carus, Carinus, and Numerian.

As these men were concerned mostly with their personal survival, broader efforts to reform the empire stagnated. This changed in AD 284, when a reform-minded man named Diocles fought his way to the top and then—astonishingly—managed to remain there for 20 years, finally bringing the stability that the empire desperately needed.

Diocletian and the Tetrarchy

In AD 284, Gaius Aurelius Valerius Diocles was still a relatively junior officer, but he became the choice of the military leadership and was acclaimed emperor. He then Latinized his name to Diocletian, which is how he is commonly known.

Diocletian had a clever solution to the perennial problem of dealing with rivals: He got the most able of them to work for him, rather than against him. He did this by selecting capable generals and delegating part of his authority to them, giving each power and administrative control over a section of the empire. Ideally, he would also create a strong personal tie with them by linking them to himself via marriage involving a member of his family.

The first and most important of these men was an officer named Maximian. He was married to one of Diocletian's daughters, and then

Diocletian basically split responsibilities for ruling the empire with Maximian, with Diocletian going east and administering that half and Maximian taking the west.



Even though it seemed as if they were splitting power, Diocletian wanted to make it clear that there was still a hierarchy existing between Maximian and himself. Thus, while both men took the traditional imperial title of Augustus, Diocletian added additional titles that indicated that he was the senior partner. Diocletian acquired the name Jovius, meaning Jupiter, who was the king of the gods; Maximian got the name Herculius, or Hercules, a demigod who often acted as Jupiter's agent.

The partnership prospered, and the two men established firm control over the empire. However, there was still such a plethora of constant threats and challenges that even two emperors seemed overtaxed, so in the early 290s, Diocletian took the concept further by adding two more so-called junior emperors. The officers selected to fill these posts were Galerius and Constantius, nicknamed “Chlorus,” or “Pale-Face.”



To indicate their lesser status, Galerius and Constantius Chlorus did not receive the title of Augustus but instead were labeled Caesars. Each was affiliated with one of the senior emperors; Constantius Chlorus specifically became Diocletian’s Caesar and Galerius became Maximian’s Caesar. To cement these bonds, Constantius married another of Diocletian’s daughters and Galerius married the daughter of Maximian.



There was an implied order of succession in this arrangement: If either Augustus died, his respective Caesar would take his place and then select a new man as his Caesar, and if Diocletian died, Maximian would step into his role as senior Augustus.

The empire now had two senior Augusti, each of them supported by a Caesar, and everyone was linked by marriage into one big—hopefully happy—extended family.

This entire system of government was known as the tetrarchy, or “rule by four.” All laws were issued in the names of all four emperors, and any triumph won by any one of them was officially celebrated on behalf of all four men. However, each emperor maintained his own separate imperial court, retinue, and bodyguards, and each minted coins with just his image on them.

Each man based himself in a separate city and administered his own region. More importantly, each had to defend and protect his region from Rome's enemies, whether internal or external.

A major component of Diocletian's reforms was a wholesale reorganization of the empire. He divided up the existing provinces,

doubling their total number from about 50 to about 100. This meant that each governor now had a smaller area to supervise, allowing him to devote more concentrated attention to problems and to become more deeply informed about local issues.

These smaller provinces were then grouped together into 12 larger units called dioceses, each of which was under the control of a higher-level administrator known as a vicar. Thus, at both the local and regional levels, there was greater oversight.

Splitting up provinces where large segments of the army were stationed into smaller units also reduced the ability of a governor to gain the allegiance of the troops in his province and stage a rebellion against the current emperor. This alone helped bring political stability to the empire.

However, the army was also restructured. During the early empire, Roman politicians had hopped back and forth between civilian and military appointments. Now, civilian and military career paths were separated, allowing aristocrats to specialize in one or the other and presumably become more competent in the one that they had chosen. And new military districts analogous to the diocese system were created for the army.

To address economic problems, Diocletian instituted a new tax scheme based on a revised census. To combat the debasement of the currency and the distrust in the monetary system that it had engendered, he introduced, in AD 286, a new coin with a guaranteed gold content followed by a new silver coin.

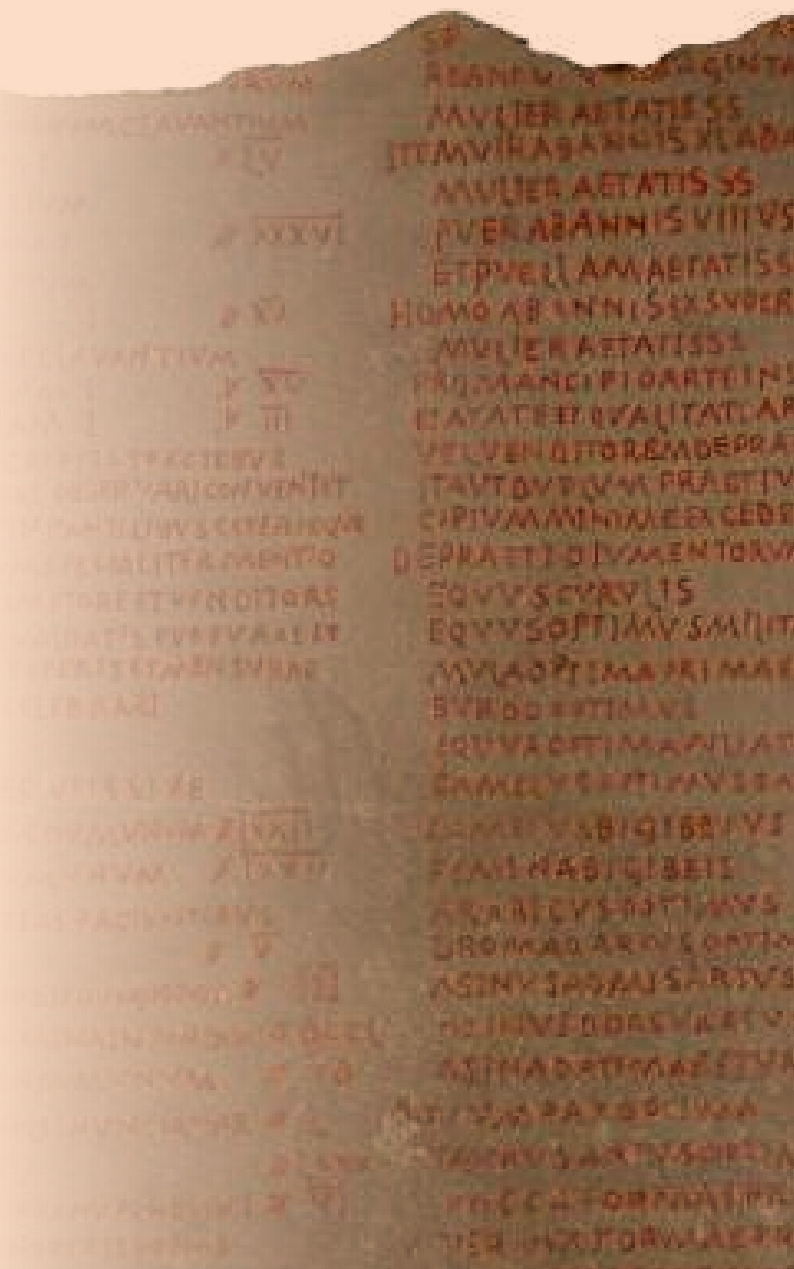
Possibly as a strategy to increase respect for the tetrarchy and to reduce rebellions, Diocletian and his co-emperors increased the amount of pomp and ritual connected with their offices. They carried jeweled scepters, wore diadems, and held more ornate court ceremonies. They openly wore regal attire and encouraged people to kneel in their presence

In AD 301, Diocletian issued the price edict, which consisted of a long list of items that one might purchase or services that one might hire and, for each one, identified the maximum price that it was legal to charge for that good or service. Thus, in a crude way, it attempted to curb inflation by simply declaring that it was an illegal act, punishable by exile or even death, to charge more than the specified amount. The edict was not successful, but it probably helped at least somewhat.

Diocletian's price edict survives and is a fascinating document to economic historians, both for the light it sheds on the relative values of goods and services and for the sheer range of items included.

Rome had traditionally been extremely tolerant of individuals' religious observances, but in this era of crisis, when unity was seen as being of paramount importance for the survival of the empire, Diocletian began to crack down on practices that were seen as deviant or, more importantly, that did not pay at least nominal homage to the state cults.

In AD 303, an edict declared that all Christians had to sacrifice to the traditional pagan gods as a display of unity. This led to persecutions of Christians.



Out of a 20-year reign, Diocletian spent less than half a year actually in Rome, illustrating how the provinces were now where the action was. Finally, on May 1, AD 305, Diocletian performed an unprecedented act: He voluntarily renounced the emperorship and handed over power to his chosen successors. This was a first in Roman history.

Diocletian retired to a fortresslike palace he had built for himself at Spalatum, now the city of Split in Croatia. He died in retirement in AD 311.



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QUESTIONS

1. Would Diocletian's accomplishments have been possible without the previous actions of Gallienus, Claudius Gothicus, and Aurelian?
2. Which of Diocletian's reforms do you think was the most helpful and which was the least helpful? Why did you pick those?

Diocletian and his fellow reformers had saved the empire when such a rescue had seemed all but impossible. As dramatic as that turnaround had been, an even more unexpected event would come in the near future with Constantine, the son of one of Diocletian's tetrarchs, who would become the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity.



EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND THE RISE OF CONSTANTINE

LECTURE 15

At the dawn of the 4th century, the history of the Roman Empire would take an unexpected turn as Christianity, hitherto a little-known religious cult, would abruptly be thrust to the forefront when the emperor himself converted. Within less than a century, Christianity not only would become accepted but would be declared the official religion of the Roman Empire, and every subsequent emperor (with one exception) would be a Christian.

Roman Paganism and Key Differences from Christianity

To most Romans living during the first several hundred years of the empire, Christianity—if they had heard of it at all—was merely one of the hundreds of obscure little cults that existed within the very diverse religious universe of the Roman Empire. While they may not have realized it, however, there were some fundamental ways in which Christianity was different from the vast majority of other religions of the time.

Christianity was a monotheistic religion in a world where almost all others were polytheistic, which means “having many gods.” Roman paganism both encompassed an immense and bewildering assortment of deities and was very open to accepting new ones.



The Roman world was teeming with all sorts of gods, demigods, and spirits.

There was the traditional Olympian pantheon of gods, such as Jupiter, Mars, Neptune, and Venus, and each of these major gods was multiplied by the addition of epithets that identified some particular aspect of the god, which was often worshipped separately.

There were also demigods, which were typically humans who had attained divine status, such as Hercules and Romulus.

Then there were many entities that might be called nature spirits, such as water nymphs.

Other gods were personifications of abstract qualities, such as Victoria, the goddess of victory.

Finally, there was an ever-expanding array of gods borrowed from other civilizations, including Egyptian, Etruscan, and Germanic deities.

It is deceptive to speak of a single notion of godhood in Roman culture because there was such a variety of forms that divine beings or spirits could take. And they did not fit into any clear hierarchy.

In Roman polytheism, people typically chose one or several gods that they worshipped particularly. Christianity, on the other hand, was aggressively monotheistic. Christians asserted that their god was the one and only legitimate god and that all others were false.

Almost none of the other religions had a sacred text comparable to the Bible that defined what its worshippers believed and claimed to contain direct written instructions from God. The notable exception was the other main monotheistic religion, Judaism, which had the Torah.

Christianity also differed in having a more private, individualized focus. In contrast, most pagan religions were public and collective. Sacrifices took place in front of temples, not hidden away inside them, and prayers offered at major religious festivals were typically made on behalf of groups rather than individuals. Christian worship, however, centered around the relationship between one person and God, and Christians typically prayed indoors.

Early Christianity

Early Christianity began as an offshoot of Judaism. Jesus was born and raised as a Jew in the Roman province of Judea. He was most likely born sometime around 4 BC, so our calendar is off by several years. Jesus lived and practiced his ministry during the reign of Augustus, although it is doubtful that Augustus ever heard of him.

As related in the Gospels, Jesus wandered around his home province preaching a basic message of love and tolerance and then was crucified around AD 30. It was really only after his death that Christianity acquired its key beliefs of salvation and resurrection.



The most important figure in the subsequent rise and spread of Christianity was the disciple Paul. After his conversion, he constantly traveled around the Mediterranean, preaching and attempting to convert others. This reaching out to a wide audience was an important jump for Christianity.

Paul also wrote a series of letters describing his beliefs and his understanding of the events of Jesus's life and Jesus's message. Other Christian leaders did the same, and these documents were copied and exchanged among various early Christian communities. Eventually, these narratives would be compiled and would form the basis of the New Testament, Christianity's unique sacred text.

Christianity spread very, very slowly. It was most successful in urban areas and, in general, thrived in places where the Roman Empire and Roman culture were strongest. Very gradually, the new religion gained converts.

When we view its spread from a historical, rather than a religious, perspective, there were a number of aspects of Christianity that had considerable appeal.

Christianity emphasized morality and caring for others.

Christianity held out the promise of an alluring reward for such moral behavior—that after death, you might live forever in a paradise. In contrast, most pagan religions of the time did not have well-developed notions of an afterlife.

Christianity did not recognize the legal and social boundaries that played such central roles in Roman culture. In the eyes of the Christian God, noncitizens were the equals of citizens, women were equal to men, and slaves were equal to free people. This perspective was a radical overturning of the existing status structure, and it is no surprise that many of the earliest converts to Christianity seem to have been those at the lower end of the Roman social scale: slaves and women.

In its very earliest stages, Christianity offered positions of authority to groups excluded from power in the Roman social hierarchy.

Conflict with Rome

Romans on the whole were very tolerant of other religions, but they always had trouble with Judaism and Christianity. They couldn't understand the secrecy of these religions. They were offended by the way they made slaves, women, and noncitizens equal to male citizens. And they had difficulty grasping the concept of monotheism. Most of all, Romans couldn't comprehend why Jews and Christians refused to acknowledge anyone else's gods.



On an emperor's birthday, it was expected that everyone would say a prayer for his health, directed toward that aspect of him that might eventually become divine, and then make a small offering of food or wine. The authorities expected everyone to participate and believed that the only reason why you would not was that you were treasonous or a revolutionary intent on overthrowing the state.

However, to a Christian, as to a Jew, taking part in such a ritual was a clear violation of the first commandment—not to worship other gods—and accordingly, they refused to do it.

Thus, something that to the Romans was a political act was to the Christians a violation of core religious beliefs. This was a failure of communication and understanding, but the result could be persecution and violent death.

Until the stressful times of the crisis of the 3rd century, it seems that more vigorous persecutions remained sporadic, local, and limited. Most Roman officials and emperors appear to have been generally reluctant to actively hunt down Christians. If accused Christians were actually brought before them and refused to offer homage to the emperor, they would face a trial and, if found guilty, be executed. But until the empire-wide persecutions that took place under Diocletian and the other emperors of his era, the state's response was more reactive than proactive.



Christians were not the only religious group to be persecuted at moments when an emperor wished to stress unity. For example, Diocletian also instigated persecutions of other sects, such as the Manichees.

While there were most certainly a number of famous incidents of martyrdom before this time, these were relatively rare, probably fewer than a few hundred victims across the entire empire over a 200-year span. For most of this period, Christians in general remained quite obscure.

Egypt, which because of its climate is the province with the best-surviving records, does not record any evidence for Christianity until AD 130. In Britain, there is nothing until the 4th century.

By the year AD 300, Christians constituted perhaps at most only 5 to 10 percent of the populace.

The Rise of Constantine and More Civil Wars

After Diocletian's retirement, resentments among the tetrarchs began to fester. The current two Augusti, or senior emperors, were Constantius Chlorus in the west and Galerius in the east. Their Caesars, or junior emperors, were Flavius Severus in the west and Maximinus Daia in the east.

The situation was further complicated by a fifth contender, Constantine, who was the son of Constantius Chlorus but who had been left out of this iteration of the tetrarchy scheme. More importantly, Constantine was both a good general and popular with the western troops. So, when Constantius Chlorus died in AD 306, the soldiers in Britain spontaneously acclaimed Constantine as their emperor. This was not how it was supposed to work, but an open conflict was avoided through an agreement by which Severus became the western Augustus and Constantine was recognized as his Caesar.

Constantine's irregular elevation enraged Maxentius, the son of another of the original tetrarchs, Maximian. Maxentius believed that because his father had been the first tetrarch added by Diocletian, he, Maximian's son, should have been named the western Caesar in preference over Constantine. Maxentius found a sympathetic audience for his claims at Rome, where the Praetorian Guard backed him. The result was that Maxentius declared himself an emperor, thereby sparking another round of civil wars.

The five rivals were temporarily reduced to four when Maxentius managed to have Severus murdered. Maxentius probably thought that he would simply take Severus's place, but his plans were thwarted when Galerius, who was notionally the most senior emperor, chose instead to appoint one of his old friends, Licinius, as Severus's replacement.



By this point, everyone was angry at everybody else, but there was a pause in open conflict while all the contenders maneuvered for advantage. Two factions emerged: Constantine and Licinius against the rival alliance of Maximinus Daia and Maxentius. Galerius was the peacemaker, who tried to hold the empire together. However, Galerius was by now quite elderly, and when he died of natural causes in AD 311, war almost immediately broke out among the ambitious contenders.

Constantine focused his attention on defeating Maxentius and invaded his stronghold of Italy in AD 312. Maxentius probably should have fought from behind Rome's now-impressive fortifications but instead marched out to meet Constantine near the Milvian Bridge. It was just prior to this battle that Constantine took the unprecedented step of converting to Christianity.

Constantine and his troops, inspired by the thought that they had a god actively aiding them, soundly defeated Maxentius's army at what became known as the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in AD 312. During the retreat, Maxentius fell into the Tiber River and drowned.





After the battle, the empire was split into three sections: Constantine held most of the west, including North Africa, Italy, and Gaul; Maximinus Daia controlled the easternmost provinces; and Licinius ruled over the sections of modern eastern Europe that lay between them.

Maximinus Daia had previously been affiliated with Maxentius, an association that helped push Constantine and Licinius together. In 313 AD, the newly converted Constantine and Licinius formally agreed to gang up on Maximinus. The two men issued the Edict of Milan, a proclamation that stated that all religions were to be tolerated and that restored previously confiscated property to the Christian church. To cement their alliance, Licinius married Constantine's half sister, Constantia.

Maximinus Daia, realizing that he could not defeat their coalition, decided to strike before his foes could unite their armies, so he invaded Licinius's territory. It was a desperate move, and his army was crushed. Daia escaped but, realizing the game was over, committed suicide shortly afterward.

Neither Constantine nor Licinius was ready to turn against the other quite yet, so their alliance continued, with the two men splitting the empire between them—Constantine controlling the west and Licinius the east. It was an uneasy partnership with frequent disagreements, but peace held for more than a decade.

One sign of a growing rift came in AD 320, when Licinius initiated persecutions of Christians in his half of the empire. The final showdown came in AD 323, when, under the pretext of repelling a Gothic incursion, Constantine marched into Licinius's territory. In the ensuing battles at Adrianople and Byzantium, Licinius was soundly defeated. Constantine initially allowed Licinius to go into exile at Thessalonica, but a few months later, he executed both him and his son.

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Van Dam, *Remembering Constantine at the Milvian Bridge*.

QUESTIONS

1. Which of the differences between early Christianity and conventional Roman paganism were the most significant? Why?
2. Which effect of Christianity becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire do you think was greater: strengthening the empire and making it more unified because of the notion of one God/one emperor, or weakening it because of Christianity's focus on the next world rather than the current one?

Diocletian's experiment with the tetrarchy had failed. Constantine was now the sole ruler of the Roman Empire, and would remain so for the next 13 years.

Although Christianity was very much an obscure minority religion at the time of his conversion, Constantine remained a Christian once he attained the throne. While Christianity had gained new converts extremely slowly up to this point, after his conversion, it would spread rapidly and soon became the official religion of the empire.

In terms of its far-reaching consequences, the conversion of Constantine is one of the pivotal moments in Roman history.



CONSTANTINE AND HIS SUCCESSORS

LECTURE 16

Constantine's victory at the Milvian Bridge in AD 312 and his accompanying conversion to Christianity are often depicted as key transitional events in Western history, marking Christianity's rise and transformation from obscure sect to dominant religion. While there is validity to this overall interpretation, questions have been raised concerning the genuineness and completeness of Constantine's conversion. Even if it was completely sincere, there is the problematic fact that for a long time afterward, he continued to promote the worship of pagan gods.

Constantine and Christianity

Throughout his early career, Constantine seems to have been strongly drawn to the idea of aligning himself with a deity who took a personal interest in his success. Initially, these claims centered around the sun god in his manifestation as Sol Invictus, the "Unconquerable Sun." This was the same deity that the emperor Aurelian had made a focal point of religious devotion during his reign.

Both Aurelian and Constantine had to contend with multiple rivals, and thus, for each man, being able to assert that he was the chosen agent of a deity helped to lend an aura of religious legitimacy to his claim to the imperial throne.

For men who had to gain power through warfare, having as a patron a god whose name included the word "unconquerable" would have been highly inspirational for the troops under their command. Constantine deliberately exploited his association with Sol Invictus to motivate his soldiers.

In AD 310, Constantine claimed to have had a vision in which Apollo appeared to him promising him victory. The similarity of this vision to one he had two years later, before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, in which the Christian God similarly manifested to Constantine with promises of military victory, has led some scholars to propose that these visions were just cynical inventions of Constantine, prompted solely by his desire to fire up his troops before key military encounters.

Against this, others have pointed out that at the time of the Milvian Bridge battle, Christianity was a minor cult. If Constantine were going to calculatingly select a god to visit him, surely he would have chosen a more popular one. Thus, the very obscurity of Christianity at this point becomes an argument in favor of the genuineness of his conversion. Also, these scholars note that even after the battle was won, Constantine remained a Christian for the rest of his life—apparently further evidence attesting to the sincerity of his conversion.

On the other hand, long after his supposed conversion, Constantine continued to take actions that seem at odds with his being a Christian—or, at the very least, with the fundamental Christian notion of monotheism. For example, Constantine kept issuing coins featuring his favorite pagan god, Sol Invictus, until AD 323, more than a decade after his conversion.

Perhaps Constantine simply did not fully grasp the exclusive nature of Christian monotheism, or perhaps he felt that as a matter of practicality he had no choice but to gradually phase out his pagan practices rather than abruptly stopping them all at once.

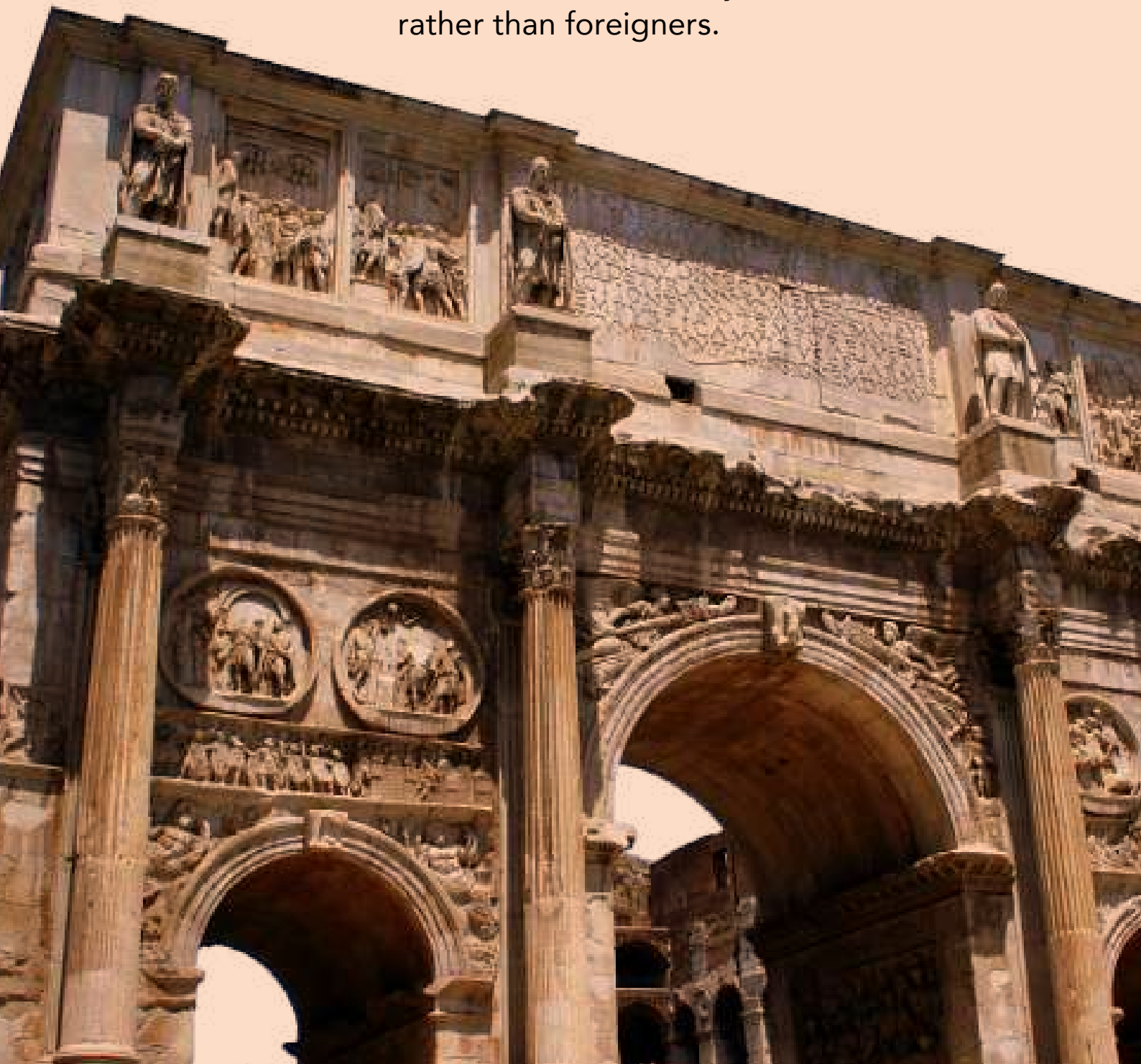
Constantine's adoption of Christianity signals an important shift in the relationship between emperors and the divine. Previous emperors had associated themselves with gods, variously styling themselves the agent of, the representative of, or sometimes even the manifestation of a specific god.

Due to the monotheistic nature of Christianity, Constantine was introducing a crucial original element. In the new system, there was one—and only one—legitimate god, and that god had chosen him—and only him—to be emperor. Thus, the theological claim had important political ramifications. Because the one god had picked Constantine to be the sole emperor, it meant that any rival claimants to the imperial throne were, by definition, illegitimate.



While personally continuing to embrace Christianity after the Milvian Bridge, Constantine also sometimes seemed a bit circumspect in his public promotion of the religion. For example, to commemorate winning the battle, he erected a triumphal arch—the Arch of Constantine—at Rome. Despite the major role that Constantine’s Christian vision played in the battle, the inscription on the arch does not specifically mention Christianity.

The Arch of Constantine is one of the few surviving victory arches at Rome. It marks the first time that such a monument was erected to celebrate a victory over fellow Romans rather than foreigners.



Constantine believed that being God's chosen emperor meant that he should have authority not only over the state, but over the church as well. He convened meetings of bishops and presided over them as if he were in control of the church.

Constantine did not make any effort to revive the tetrarchy system created by Diocletian. Constantine plainly wished to rule alone, and Christian monotheism provided a justification for and a legitimization of his vision of sole emperorship.



Constantine the Emperor

As emperor, Constantine performed a number of important actions. Although he rejected the tetrarchy system, he enthusiastically embraced most of Diocletian's reforms and expanded, solidified, and further institutionalized them so that they became the model for government that subsequent emperors would follow.

He similarly confirmed and built upon the military restructuring of Diocletian and the other reformers of that era. He also continued their economic policies and undertook further attempts to stabilize the coinage. Constantine increased the number of senators and reduced many of the previous distinctions between senators and equestrians.

Perhaps most influentially, he founded a new city to serve as the eastern capital of the empire. He selected the old Greek colony of Byzantium and completely rebuilt it into a spectacular new capital, which he named after himself Constantinople—which is today Istanbul.

Constantinople was conceived self-consciously as a second Rome and was accordingly given all the same features as the western capital. Constantine endowed Constantinople with a grand palace, an amphitheater, a hippodrome for chariot racing, a senate, and libraries. And, just like Rome, the city was divided up into 14 districts. The grand new eastern capital was officially dedicated on May 11, 330, and Constantine resided there for most of the rest of his reign.

It is easy to see why Constantine would be drawn to the political corollaries of a monotheistic religion, because it offered a way to quash political division, but he seems to have extended this idea to religion itself, deciding that it was a bad thing for there to be any religious factionalism among Christians.

Therefore, he took an active role in attempting to resolve several purely theological disputes that threatened to fracture the early Christian community.





Shortly before his death, Constantine was baptized. Such delayed baptism was not a sign of lack of dedication to his new religion, however; instead, it was a fairly common practice of the time.

After a long rule that had brought stability and rejuvenation to the empire, Constantine died of natural causes in AD 337.

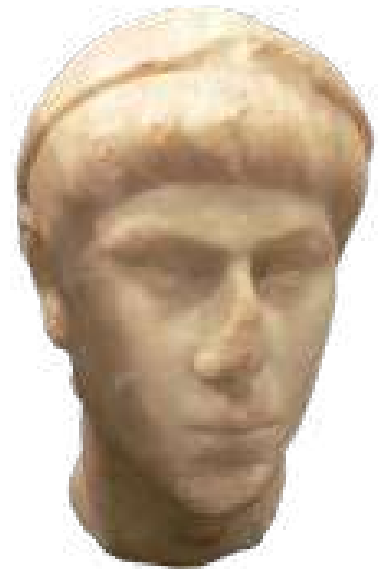
Just like Augustus, Constantine claimed that he had saved or restored the Roman Republic. This illustrates how the old propaganda of the republic was still potent and in use 300 years after it had realistically ceased to exist. Constantine saw himself as the third founder of Rome—as a third Romulus, or perhaps a second Augustus.

With Constantine, it appeared that the empire had met the challenge of Christianity by incorporating the religion and using it to strengthen itself.

The Heirs of Constantine

Constantine had a large family, and after his death, his relatives scrambled for a share of power. The ultimate winners of this bloody struggle were three sons of Constantine's second wife, Fausta, who divided up the empire among themselves.

The most dynamic of the sons was Constantius II. These were troubled times, and soon more strife arose, resulting in a complicated sequence of wars, rivalries, rebellions, and conflicts that involved external and internal foes. Over the course of these, both of Constantius's brothers, as well as a number of pretenders, were slain. By AD 353, Constantius found himself the lone survivor and thus the sole ruler of the Roman Empire.



By this point, however, it had become apparent that the empire required at least two emperors—one in the east and one in the west—to provide adequate leadership and to respond rapidly to threats. Constantius searched among his remaining relatives for likely candidates to serve as a junior emperor—as Caesar to his Augustus.

Constantius settled on the only two of his cousins who had escaped the earlier purges. The first of these, Gallus, was elevated to serve as ruler of the east but soon proved a disappointment, so Constantius had his head chopped off. The second cousin, Julian, was then installed as his replacement and demonstrated considerably more talent.

Julian had a strong intellectual bent and turned out to be an able general, and under his leadership, the western armies reeled off an impressive series of victories over sundry barbarians in Britain and up and down the Rhine frontier.

Meanwhile, Constantius campaigned conscientiously to secure the eastern borders. He continued most of the policies of Constantine, including the promotion of Christianity. He banned sacrifices and, in AD 356, even ordered that many pagan temples be closed.



The Sassanians were a serious threat in the east and, under their current king, Shapur II, captured some important Roman outposts. It was necessary to respond to these provocations, but Constantius was uncertain whether he possessed sufficient forces to take on Shapur II. He therefore ordered that Julian detach some of his troops and send them to the east to join Constantius's invasion force.

Constantius was also worried that Julian's successes might make him a rival, so this move was meant to have the additional advantage of weakening Julian. It backfired, however, when the western soldiers protested the plan and acclaimed Julian as a full-fledged emperor. War between Constantius and Julian seemed imminent, but before it could occur, Constantius fell ill and died in AD 361, leaving Julian as the default ruler of the entire empire.

Julian the Apostate

In a dramatic turn of events, upon his succession, Julian revealed that even though he had been raised a Christian, he had secretly been a pagan all along. He canceled the edicts constraining pagan worship that had been passed by Constantine and Constantius and reopened the temples. While personally Julian favored paganism, he did not actively persecute or disadvantage Christianity, although he stripped it of some of the government subsidies and privileges that it had acquired.

Officially, Julian's policy was one of religious toleration that allowed the inhabitants of the Roman Empire to pursue freely whatever form of worship they preferred. He seems to have tried to resuscitate the proto-monotheistic version of syncretic paganism espoused by some earlier emperors that centered around the sun god, and he may even have tried to graft onto this an ethical system borrowed from Christianity.

Julian's assessment of the empire's readiness to enthusiastically embrace a return to paganism was overly optimistic. Soon after taking power, he also precipitously announced his intention to personally take charge of the war against Shapur II and attack the Sassanian kingdom. Here, too, he seems to have fallen prey to overconfidence. The invasion did not go well, and during a minor cavalry skirmish, Julian was struck in the side by a spear. The wound proved fatal, and Julian died shortly afterward.

Julian died in AD 363, ending a reign of only three years, and after him, all Roman emperors would be Christian.

Due to his attempted revival of paganism, Christian authors gave Julian the name he is commonly known by today: Julian the Apostate.

READINGS

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QUESTIONS

1. What do you think was the primary motivation for Constantine's conversion to Christianity? Do you see a contradiction between his status as a Christian and any of his actions as emperor?
2. If Julian's attempt to revive paganism had been more successful, could Christianity and paganism have coexisted amicably in the Roman Empire? Why or why not?

At the end of the 4th century AD, Rome was about to come face to face with an intensification of barbarian invasions that would result in the collapse of the western half of the empire.

Before exploring the highly controversial questions of when and why the Roman Empire fell, let's first pause for a few lectures to investigate two of the most famous aspects of Roman civilization, both of which center around violence and bloodshed: bloody public spectacles (such as gladiator games) and the institution of the Roman army.



GLADIATORS AND BEAST HUNTS

LECTURE 17

In the popular imagination, one of the most famous figures associated with ancient Rome is the gladiator. The image of brawny warriors battling to the death in gigantic marble amphitheaters for the amusement of a rabidly cheering crowd is a powerful one, but the way that gladiator games are depicted in movies and novels is rarely accurate. The Romans were indeed fond of spectacular public entertainments, and gladiator games were certainly one of these. However, they were not the only kind of violent public spectacle, nor the most common—nor even the most popular.

Early in Roman history, it became traditional for the state, on certain holidays, to provide entertainments, of which there were two broad categories: *ludi*, or games, including theatrical performances, dances, and chariot races; and *munera*, or spectacles, such as gladiatorial combats, wild animal shows, and other unusual exhibitions.

The biggest difference between the Romans' concept of entertainment and our own is that most of these events had a religious component. They were typically held on religious holidays, were accompanied by prayers and sacrifices, and were regarded as a way of paying homage to the gods.



Gladiator Games

The notion of gladiators probably originated with the Etruscans, who preceded the Romans in central Italy. Among the Etruscans, when a leader died, as part of the funeral ceremony, a pair of warriors sometimes fought to the death to honor his warlike spirit. Over time, this practice became institutionalized, and the Romans subsequently imitated it. Throughout the next 800 years of the Roman Republic, however, gladiator games remained infrequent and on a small scale and were always held as part of a funeral service.

Like much else, this began to change in the late republic. Julius Caesar put on a gladiatorial show that featured an unheard-of 320 pairs of gladiators. This was supposedly in honor of his father, despite the fact that the elder Caesar had been dead for more than 20 years. Nevertheless, these games made the younger Caesar popular with the people of Rome.

During the empire, by law, the senate could sponsor no more than two gladiator shows per year. There was no limit, however, to the quantity that the emperor could hold. Despite this, they always remained rare and unusual events.

There was a steady increase in both the number of days when games were held at Rome and the number of regularly scheduled gladiator games. By AD 354, spectacles of one sort or another were held on half of the days of the year.



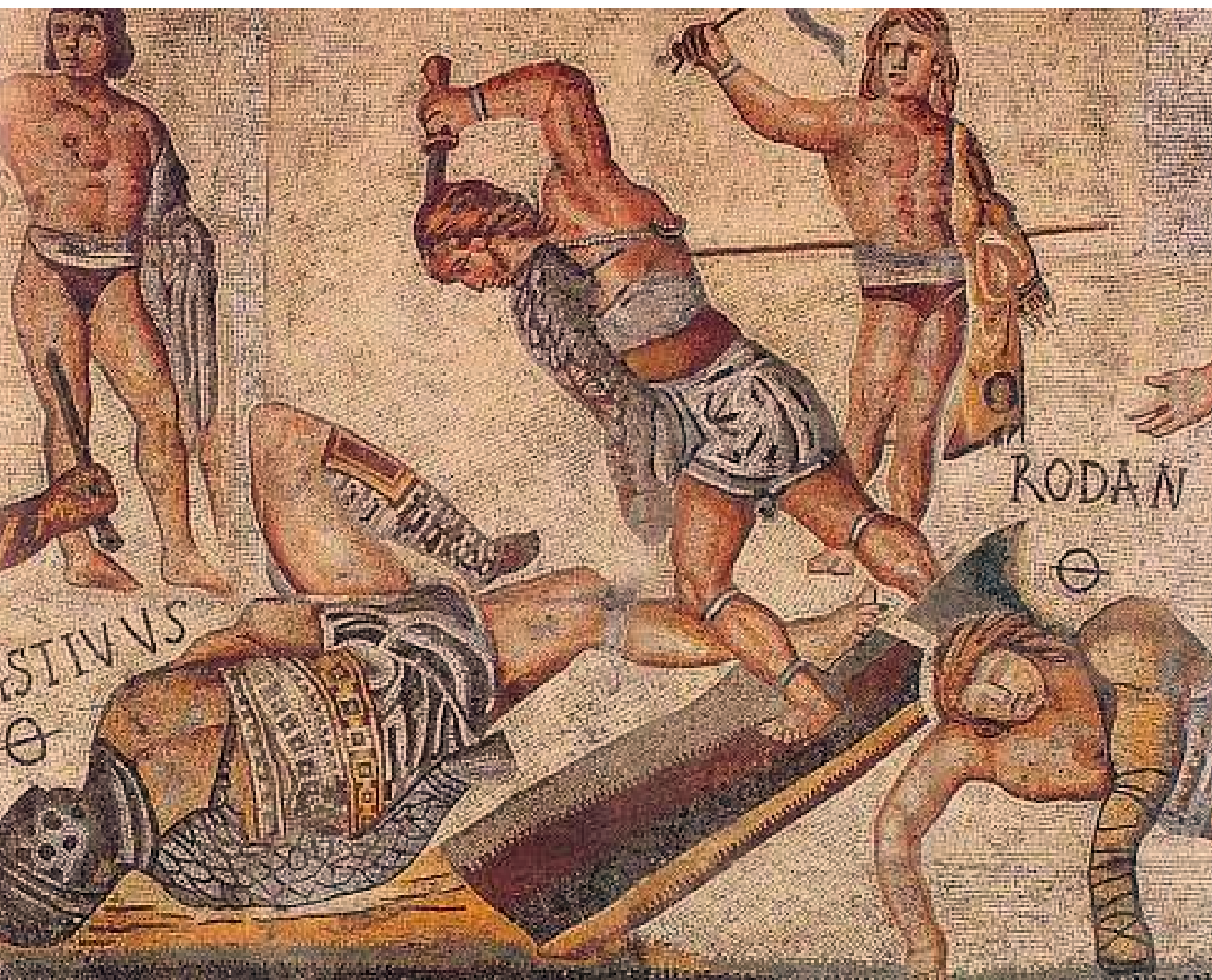
Over the course of his 60-plus-year reign, the emperor Augustus put on gladiator shows only eight times. Thus, the popular image in movies and on television of Romans spending all their time at gladiator shows is erroneous.

There were three typical sources for gladiators.

Most commonly, they were slaves who were assigned to be gladiators because they seemed likely to be good fighters. This category incorporated prisoners of war seized in Rome's campaigns.

Secondly, criminals were sometimes condemned to be gladiators.

The third, and probably rarest, type was free people who volunteered to become gladiators in a quest for fame and money.



The vast majority of gladiators were men, although there are attested instances of some female gladiators.

When someone became a gladiator, he was sent to gladiator school, where many adopted a stage name. Much like the colorful monikers of professional wrestlers today, such names were often chosen because they sounded menacing or implied something about the martial skills of the gladiator—for example, Flamma, or “the Flame.” During the republic, most of these schools were privately owned businesses, but under the empire, they all fell under the control of the emperor and the state.

The Romans liked to see a battle of contrasts and thus often matched a heavily armed and armored man against a lightly equipped and more mobile opponent. When someone wished to put on a gladiatorial show, he would rent the desired number of gladiators from one of the schools. The prices seem to

Some gladiators, particularly foreign soldiers captured in wars against Rome, would choose to commit suicide rather than fight each other.

have ranged from about 1,000 sesterces for a first-time or not very talented gladiator to around 15,000 for an experienced veteran of many combats and even 100,000 for famous gladiators.

On the day of the show, the festivities began with a parade of the participants. At the head of the procession was the person providing the funding. During this parade—and indeed throughout the day’s activities—a band played.

In the morning, there might be exhibitions of wild beasts and beast hunts. These continued until noon, when there was an intermission. During this break, the spectators had the choice of either going to get some lunch or staying and watching executions. Criminals were led into the arena, where they were lined up and had their throats cut. When Christians were persecuted during the later empire, they were often put to death during these intermissions.

In the afternoon came the main event: the gladiator fight. One tradition has the gladiators coming out and raising their weapons in salute to the giver of the games while shouting “*Morituri te salutant*,” or “We who are about to die salute you.”

Whenever a gladiator received a wound, the crowd would shout out *habet*, meaning “a hit.” A gladiator could ask for mercy by dropping his shield and raising a finger of his left hand. The crowd then either called for him to be killed or, if he had fought well, asked that he be spared. They did this using both shouts and gestures. If the crowd demanded death, then the winner plunged his sword into his enemy’s throat. The victor received a palm of victory, a crown, and prize money.

From the 1st century AD, details of about 100 fights are preserved on tombstones or inscriptions, and out of the 200 gladiators involved, 19 are recorded as having been killed. Each gladiator probably fought only a few times a year, but nonetheless, to win more than 10 combats seems to have been exceptional. If a gladiator fought extraordinarily well, he might be freed, although it seems that many continued to compete even though they no longer had to.

Champion gladiators were celebrities with status similar to that of rock stars today. Women threw themselves at gladiators, and there are many stories of rich aristocratic women having affairs with them. The gladiator functioned as a symbol of virility in Roman society. At the same time, they were also one of the most despised groups in society.



Amphitheaters

The earliest gladiatorial games seem to have been held in the Roman Forum, and this practice continued throughout nearly the entire republic. For some of the larger, more elaborate games toward the end of the republic, temporary wooden amphitheaters were constructed. The basic amphitheater form seems to have been inspired by simply attaching two theaters back-to-back. This created a central space where the combats took place, surrounded by stepped seating for the audience.

The oldest-known stone amphitheater is the one located in the city of Pompeii on the Bay of Naples. The first permanent stone amphitheater at Rome was not built until 30 BC, when one was erected in the Campus Martius by Statilius Taurus.

The largest and most famous amphitheater is the one today known as the Colosseum, although its proper name is the Flavian Amphitheater, after the family of emperors who built it in the late 1st century AD. In its final form, the exterior consisted of four levels of arched colonnades. The edifice was composed of a concrete and brick core and was faced with tufa and travertine stone.

It has been estimated that more than 100,000 tons of fine travertine were used on the exterior of the amphitheater.



Upon entering one of the 78 ground-level entrances, each of which was marked by a number, spectators found their way to their seats through an extraordinarily complex network of ramps, stairs, and corridors. In all, there were four tiers of seats with an additional standing-room-only gallery at the highest level, making a total capacity of about 55,000 people.

Roman spectators were given tokens similar to modern stadium tickets that listed the number of their gate, the level, the section, and the row where they would sit. The seating was arranged as a microcosm of Roman society, with the spectators placed according to their status. The emperor or the presiding magistrate, along with his coterie, was seated in a special box, and the prime seats at the lowest level were reserved for other important figures. The lowest rows of seats were reserved for senators, while those immediately above were set aside for equestrians. The poor, women, and slaves seem to have been relegated to the highest tier, in the gallery.

Beneath the floor of the arena were two subterranean levels, which contained at least 32 cages for wild animals as well as rooms for gladiators and equipment. This underground maze also included an elaborate system of trapdoors and elevators to raise scenery up into the arena or, perhaps most spectacularly, to disgorge combatants or wild animals, which would seem to spring forth unexpectedly from the ground itself.

Just to the east of the Flavian Amphitheater was a complex known as the Ludus Magnus, one of four gladiator training schools set up by the emperor Domitian to ensure an adequate supply of gladiators for the amphitheater. It included barracks, training facilities, and a small amphitheater that could hold about 3,000 spectators. The entire compound was directly connected to the substructure of the Flavian Amphitheater by an underground tunnel.

Beast Hunts

The Romans seem to have had a fascination with exotic animals. However, a proper zoo was never established at Rome; instead, they seem mostly to have enjoyed just watching these animals kill or be killed. As with gladiatorial combat, this form of entertainment grew popular in the late republic.



In a single day during the empire, the following animals were slaughtered at Rome: 32 elephants, 10 elk, 20 mules, 10 tigers, 40 horses, 60 lions, 30 leopards, 10 hyenas, 10 giraffes, 6 hippos, a rhino, and several dozen gazelles and ostriches.

Pompey started the trend with some games at which several hundred lions and leopards were slain. The Roman conquest of North Africa and Egypt made all sorts of exotic animals available, with the first hippo and crocodile arriving at Rome in 58 BC.

There were four main ways in which animals were used for entertainment:

- an armed man versus a wild animal or animals;
- animals versus other animals;
- people being fed to animals; and
- trained animals performing tricks.

This last category was unusual in that it was the only one that did not focus on the death of the participants. The Romans liked watching performing bears and seals do tricks, much like what you might see at a modern circus.

A beast hunt, called a *venatione*, pitted a man, called a *bestiarius*, armed with a dagger or spear, against one or several animals. To make these hunts more exciting, sometimes natural settings were built in the arena, including forests, hills, caves, and streams.

When animals were pitted against each other, to make sure that they would fight, the Romans often bound them together with a chain. Favorite pairings of this sort included a bull versus a bear and an elephant versus a rhino.

The last form of beast show was perhaps the most sadistic. The Romans had special carts built with a stake projecting up from them. Criminals were tied to the stakes and then the wagons were wheeled into the arena. Once the handlers had left, starving animals were released and proceeded to chew on the helpless victims at their leisure.

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Futrell, *Blood in the Arena*.

Toner, *The Day Commodus Killed a Rhino*.

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QUESTIONS

1. What do you make of the apparent contradiction that gladiators were looked down on and despised, yet were also objects of admiration and adoration? What does this reveal about Roman society?
2. Why do you think the Romans spent so much effort bringing huge numbers of wild beasts to Rome only to kill them but did not seem interested in establishing anything like a zoo?

Perhaps the most amazing beast hunt took place during the 123-day-long games of Trajan, which, in addition to featuring 10,000 gladiators, saw 11,000 wild animals slaughtered in the arena.

In view of such a statistic, it is no surprise that the Romans caused most of the large wild animals of North Africa to become extinct.



CHARIOT RACING, SPECTACLES, AND THEATER

LECTURE 18

The most common, most popular, and most traditional form of public entertainment in ancient Rome was not gladiator games, but chariot races. The legendary founder of Rome, Romulus, supposedly began this custom in the 8th century BC by staging spectacular games featuring chariot races, inviting all the neighboring tribes and then using the games as an opportunity to kidnap the visitors' women. Later in Roman history, the largest stadium in Rome was not the Colosseum, but rather the Circus Maximus, the site of chariot racing, which became the favorite entertainment of the average citizen of Rome.

Chariot Racing and the Circus Maximus

The Circus Maximus was situated in the long, narrow valley between the Palatine and Aventine Hills, which formed a natural stadium. The Etruscans appear to have first held races here, and crowds likely gathered on the slopes of the hills to watch.

Over time, the creek in the bottom of the valley was drained and a wooden structure erected. By the time of the empire, this seems to have been largely replaced by a stone one, and by the time of Trajan, it had become a gigantic and awe-inspiring marble edifice. Races continued to be held here through at least the 6th century AD.



The Circus Maximus was by far the largest stadium in Rome. It was a third of a mile long with a potential capacity of 250,000 spectators. Unlike the Flavian Amphitheater, whose 55,000 seats would have been predominantly occupied by the upper classes, the Circus Maximus was so great in size that all segments of Roman society could attend races. Admission was either free or for a nominal fee.

Organizations called factions trained, equipped, and entered teams in the races. Originally, there seem to have been just two of these: the Reds and the Whites. Two more were soon added: the Blues and

the Greens. For most of racing history, these traditional four factions dominated. Drivers dressed in the color of their faction so that they would be easily identifiable as they circled the track.

The factions were large and powerful associations. Each one owned extensive stables and breeding farms for their horses as well as highly organized training centers and schools for their charioteers. They also maintained numerous grooms and veterinarians.

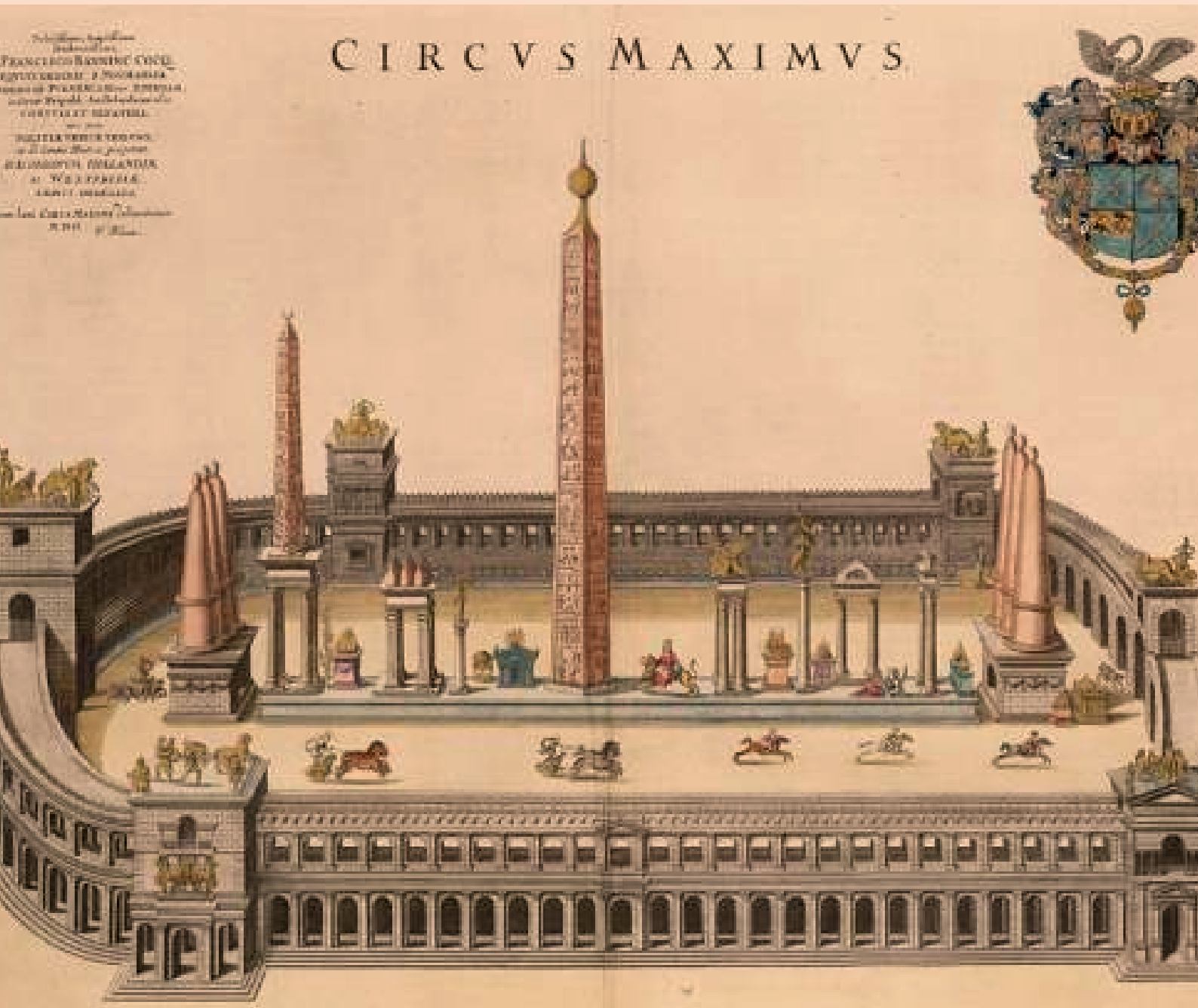
The Circus Maximus was an impressive building whose design affected how races unfolded. It enclosed a long, oval-shaped track, and the entire structure in its final form was more than 2,000 feet long and 600 feet wide. One end of the oval was flat rather than curved, and the starting gates were located along the flat side of the oval. There were 12 of these gates, called *carceres*; therefore, a race could have a maximum of 12 chariots.

Down the center of the track was a long, narrow divider more than 1,000 feet long known as the *spina*, meaning “the spine.” At each end of the *spina* were three cones, the *metae*, which functioned as the posts around which the chariots turned. Along its length, the *spina* was decorated with several Egyptian obelisks, as well as various statues and monuments. Also on the *spina* were the mechanisms used to mark laps.

Chariot racing was the most popular and accessible form of entertainment for the average inhabitant of the city. Whereas there might have been only two or three gladiator contests per year, each of the more than 100 holidays per year would have included chariot racing.

One of the Circus Maximus's obelisks, which was more than 100 feet tall and weighed 455 tons, had been stolen from a temple at Karnak in Egypt and was transported to Italy on a specially built ship.

It still survives at Rome today and now stands in the piazza in front of the Archbasilica of St. John Lateran.



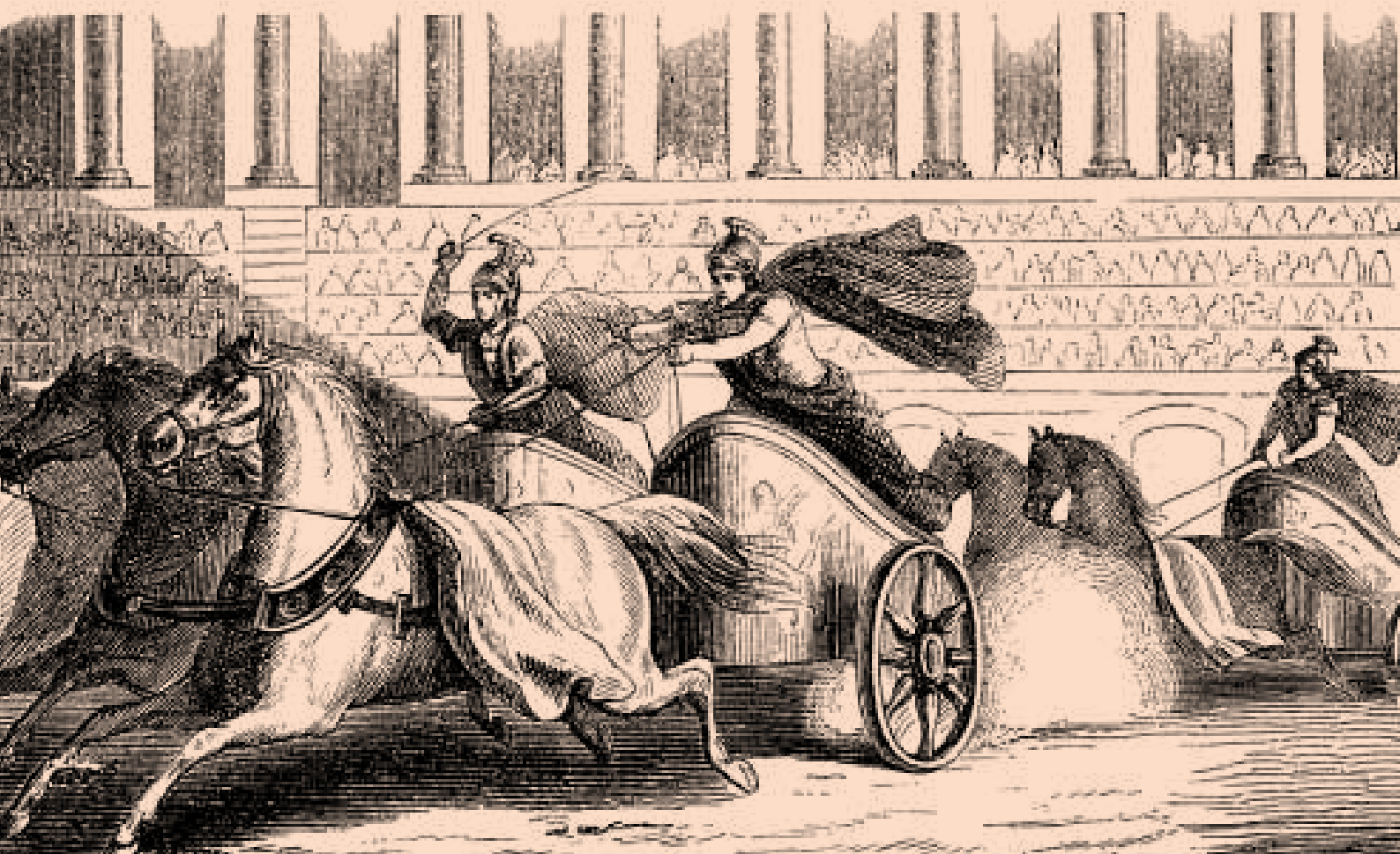
The total length of a standard chariot race was about five miles, and it probably took less than 15 minutes to complete.

There were many types of races. One employed two-horse chariots known as *bigae*, but the most popular and common races involved four-horse chariots called *quadrigae*. Nearly all races were of one of these two main kinds, though for the sake of novelty there could be unusual variations.

Collisions of chariots were frequent. The stadium actually seems to have been designed to maximize carnage, and crashes were often fatal. Many charioteers died not directly as the result of a wreck, but from being dragged around the track after one. This was because charioteers habitually tied the reins to their arms.

Making races even more competitive was the fact that all the chariots from a single faction could work together as a team. To ensure the victory of one chariot from the faction, the other two might sacrifice themselves by obstructing chariots from the other factions or even intentionally ramming them.

One of the most successful charioteers was Gaius Appuleius Diocles, whose racing career lasted 24 years. He participated in 4,257 races, 1,462 of which he won. The prizes he earned were worth a total of about 36 million sesterces.



There were 24 races per day, and thus a person could spend an entire day at the Circus Maximus. Between races, brief entertainments of various types kept the crowd from getting bored. A surviving program for a day's races lists some examples, including singing rope dancers, mimes, a parade, hounds chasing gazelles, and a troupe of athletes.

The inhabitants of Rome were truly fanatical spectators. Just as modern sports fans follow specific teams, Romans would choose a faction and live and die by the fortunes of that group.

Winning charioteers received a crown of palm leaves and prize money. These awards seem to have ranged between 5,000 and 60,000 sesterces for first place, and there were also lesser prizes for second, third, and fourth places.

The most successful charioteers became phenomenally wealthy in addition to being famous. They were celebrities who even had poems written about them. Even some particularly successful horses became celebrities.

Spectacles

In addition to these regularly scheduled entertainments, occasionally an emperor would sponsor a special spectacle. One example was a naumachia, a naval battle. These could be held on an existing lake, or an artificial lake might be dug. Squadrons of ships manned by slaves or criminals were pitted against each other. Another attested type of aquatic spectacle was some sort of synchronized swimming performance by women costumed as water nymphs.

A different category of spectacle that was always popular was reenactments of famous historical battles or mythological stories. On the simple end, this might involve dressing up a few gladiators as Greeks and Trojans to stage a Trojan War. More creative variants acted out mythological stories. A popular myth was that of Icarus, who tried to fly using wings fashioned out of wax and feathers. Foolishly, Icarus flew too close to the sun and the wax melted, causing his wings to fall apart and Icarus to plummet to his death.



The biggest naumachia ever was held on the Fucine Lake by the emperor Claudius. In this colossal encounter, two complete fleets of ships were manned by 19,000 men. The two sides allegedly fought with great enthusiasm, and according to Tacitus, "After much blood had flowed, the survivors were spared."

Sometimes, in ordinary theatrical performances, rather than using special effects to simulate violence, the Romans would simply insert a slave and inflict real violence. Nero once attended a play called *The Fire*, in which a full-size wooden house was constructed onstage and filled with valuable objects. It was then lit on fire, and people were told that they could keep whatever they could save from the collapsing building. Entertainments such as these destroyed the fundamental distinction between theater and real life.

Theater, Dance, and Pantomime

Like most cultures, the Romans enjoyed music, theater, and dance. In ancient Rome, however, theater, music, and dance were often combined as one synthetic experience rather than being presented as independent art forms.

From the 3rd century BC onward, plays were performed on the model of Greek theater, with masks and without women actors. Male actors, who were usually slaves or freedmen who had been specially trained for the stage, played the female parts. Roman playwrights such as Plautus are best known today for their comedies, which relied heavily on stock characters, coincidences, and mistaken or hidden identities.

For a long time, the Romans made do with temporary wooden theaters. Some of these could be quite elaborate, incorporating marble columns and statues. The first stone theater at Rome, built in the southern Campus Martius by Pompey the Great in 55 BC, could hold about 10,000 spectators. This theater was quickly supplemented in the next 50 years by two others: the Theater of Balbus and the even larger Theater of Marcellus, which could hold an estimated 15,000 spectators.

From the 1st century BC on, mimes and pantomimes outstripped plays to become the most popular genres of theatrical entertainment. Ancient mime was different in style from what is currently practiced, because the performers had speaking roles. Mimes sang, danced, and acted without masks; pantomimes wore masks, acted, and danced but didn't sing (instead, musicians or a chorus offered musical accompaniment). Also, women were permitted to act in mimes and pantomimes.

In a general sense, the two forms can be distinguished by subject matter: Mimes tended to be realistic, comic, and even vulgar and could deal with any topic, whereas pantomimes resembled ballet productions of themes and stories from myth and evolved into impressive spectacles full of elaborate staging, costumes, and special effects.

Mime did not require a special setting; it was often used as entertainment between acts at the theater, so mimes would perform in front of a linen screen pulled out to hide the stage scenery.

Mimes were considered more lowbrow than pantomimes, as they were meant to produce laughter by any means, including physical comedy and beatings, while pantomimes were often tragic in character.

Ancient Roman dance was not exactly like dance in the modern sense, in that it often focused on stylized rhythmic and expressive movements of the head and hands. There are mentions of athletically strenuous and abrupt motions, such as leaps,

twists, quick turns, jerks, and suddenly freezing in place—all of which were intended to help illustrate the story being told.

Dance and dramatic performances were accompanied by music, and choral singing and solos existed in ancient times. Poetry was usually set to music played on stringed instruments, and poets were often also musicians who crafted the musical arrangements for their own poems.

The popularity of mimes and pantomimes as forms of entertainment was probably at least partly due to the relative unimportance of language. Rome's diverse populace and its many foreigners could appreciate the stories being told through the actors' use of gestures and sign language, which were crucial to conveying the action.



Despite the ubiquity of music in everyday life and the admiration afforded to those who were musically skilled, the Romans had a mixed reaction and contradictory stance toward music and dance. Stern Roman tradition dictated that music, singing, and dancing were morally suspect, improper pursuits for freeborn Roman citizens that should be relegated to slaves and freedmen, who already suffered from lowered status. Over time, attitudes relaxed so that an amateur interest in music was acceptable and even the emperor could indulge in music.

READINGS

Cameron, *Circus Factions*.

Christensen and Kyle, eds., *A Companion to Sport and Spectacle in Greek and Roman Antiquity*.

Meijer, *Chariot Racing in the Roman Empire*.

QUESTIONS

1. How does Roman chariot racing compare to modern professional sports in terms of organization, appeal, popularity, fans, venues, and social role?
2. What do you think is the best explanation for why the Romans were so fond of staging entertainments that featured real death and bloodshed?

While there were some nonviolent entertainments in ancient Rome, the degree to which bloodshed and death were an essential component of so many others has rightfully drawn attention and condemnation. The extravagant violence and cruelty of many Roman spectacles have prompted much debate as to their purpose and morality. Even among the Romans, there were some who questioned them and were disgusted by them.

Nevertheless, gladiator games and over-the-top spectacles remain among the best-known aspects of Roman civilization.



THE ROMAN ARMY

LECTURE 19

The Roman army is renowned as one of the most successful military forces in history, and it enabled the Romans first to conquer their vast empire and then to maintain it for hundreds of years. The Roman army did not just conquer the Mediterranean world, but it served as the mechanism by which hundreds of thousands of provincials became Romanized, acquired Roman customs and culture, and maybe even learned to speak Latin. It was also a path for social mobility that enabled young men from all parts of the empire to gain status and increase their wealth.

The Roman army went through many changes over the course of its existence.

During the early stages of Roman history and throughout much of the republic, it had the nature of a seasonal citizens' militia, primarily composed of farmers.

As Rome grew during the middle republic and its wars became longer and more demanding, the army evolved, adopting new tactics and weapons. This version of the military is sometimes referred to as the Polybian system, after the ancient author who described it most fully.

By the late republic, it had become a far more professionalized force, with a greater emphasis on discipline, and soldiering had developed into a career rather than a part-time occupation. Figures such as Julius Caesar introduced further reforms, and after emerging victorious from the civil wars and establishing the principate, Augustus undertook another wholesale reorganization of Rome's military.

The version of the army that will be described in this lecture represents mainly the one that existed in the first several centuries AD, when the Roman Empire was at its height. In the later Roman Empire, the organization, mission, and equipment of the military would change yet again.

Size and Recruitment

Augustus set the size of the Roman military at 28 legions, but this number crept upward under subsequent emperors to 30 during the 2nd century AD and to 33 in the 3rd. With each legion having a paper strength of around 5,500 men, there were between 150,000 and 200,000 legionaries during this period.

However, the legions, which were composed entirely of citizens, were augmented by the *auxilia*, which were military units drawn from the free noncitizen inhabitants of the empire. The number of auxiliaries serving in the Roman military seems to have been equal to or greater than the number of legionaries so that they would constitute another 200,000 to 300,000 troops.

Finally, there were various other military and paramilitary units, such as the Roman navy and the Praetorian Guard, who collectively added at least 50,000 more men.



Just feeding, equipping, and paying the military absorbed much of the economic surplus produced by the entire Roman Empire.

Thus, the total armed forces of the Roman Empire during the first several centuries AD approached half a million men. This was a gigantic figure for a preindustrial agrarian society to maintain as a permanent standing force, and it represents a sizable portion of the available nonfarming manpower of the empire.

The Roman legions were a volunteer army. For much of Roman history, there were more people attempting to join than there were spaces available, so it was a selective process. Preference was traditionally given to the sons of soldiers, and hopeful applicants could also try to get letters of recommendation from current soldiers or people with political influence. Demographic analysis of soldiers' tombstones suggests that two-thirds of Roman legionaries enlisted between the ages of 17 and 20.

To enlist, prospective recruits had to present proof that they were free Roman citizens, and at this initial stage, there was also usually a medical exam. Ideally, the Romans tried to recruit soldiers who were at least five feet and eight inches in height, although there seem to have been large numbers of shorter men serving. If they passed all these tests, they were assigned to a legion and had to travel to wherever it was stationed. Upon reaching the legion, they had to swear the military oath, the *sacramentum*, in which they pledged loyalty to the emperor.

Then, the recruits had to undergo several months of training. The first phase of this emphasized physical fitness, and the men spent most of their time marching and drilling. The next stage was weapons training. Drill and training never stopped in the Roman army, and units spent much of their spare time practicing formations, mock battles, and maneuvers.

The Romans believed that farm boys made the best soldiers, because they were already accustomed to physical labor and hardship, and that, conversely, urban dwellers often proved too soft for army life.

In close combat, Roman soldiers were masters at making deadly thrusts with their swords, and ancient sources often contrast the highly disciplined legionaries' precise stabs with the wild, slashing strokes of their barbarian opponents.

During the early empire, the standard pay for a common legionary was 900 sesterces per year, a figure that steadily rose in later centuries. While this seems like a decent salary, the legionaries only ever saw a fraction of it, because most of their pay was deducted for their food, clothing, and equipment, and the amount they actually received as cash was minimal.

Enrolling in the legions was a long-term commitment. They were obligated to serve 16 years, later raised to 25, although the last five of these was on lighter, detached duties, as a veteran. The real reward for being a legionary did not come until you were discharged. If you managed to survive your term, upon discharge you were awarded a metal diploma stating that you were a veteran and granting you certain legal privileges. In addition, you collected either a large lump sum of cash or were given title to a plot of land.



One source of resentment among soldiers was the fact that, by law, they could not get married while on active duty. In practice, most soldiers had wives and children, but technically these were concubines and illegitimate children until after one's discharge, when one could then legally marry and adopt. Eventually, this law was changed under the emperor Septimius Severus.

The legionaries were almost all heavy infantry, equipped with substantial armor and fighting on foot, but armies also need other types of troops, such as archers, horsemen, and lightly armed skirmishers. Each legion had a small cavalry unit attached to it, but the Romans mostly preferred to fill these supplemental positions with noncitizen auxiliary units.

Auxilia were usually organized into groups of either 500 or 1,000. Certain ethnic or geographic groups within the empire were thought to be especially talented at various specialized forms of warfare and were often formed into *auxilia* units based around these specialties.

Auxilia earned less pay than legionaries and were required to serve 25 to 30 years. The big incentive to serve as an *auxilia* was that if you survived your 30 years, upon discharge you received full Roman citizenship. Many sons of *auxilia* then enrolled as legionaries, and the *auxilia* became one of the principal forces of Romanization in the empire.

Organization, Equipment, and Characteristics

The Roman army was perhaps the first in which organization was raised almost to an art form. All aspects of the soldier's daily schedule were regulated, his equipment was standardized, and he knew exactly his place and role within the army.

The basic army group was the legion, and every legion was elaborately subdivided. Each legion also had a contingent of cavalry as well as military engineers, clerks, supply officers, surveyors, medical staff, orderlies, and the officers for the legion. This complex organization is one of the keys to Rome's success, because in battle a legion could either maneuver as a whole or could be broken apart into units ranging from eight to 480 men, and each of these units was trained to act both independently and together with others as the need arose.

Each legion was commanded by a legate, who had to be of senatorial rank and who was usually personally appointed by the emperor. Under him were six officers known as military tribunes. Both legates and tribunes were, in essence, political appointments. These were usually held by politicians as one stage in their political career on their way toward the consulship, rather than by soldiers for whom the army was a lifetime career.

This was perhaps one of the greatest weaknesses in the Roman military system, because it meant that the high-ranking officers in the legion were not professional soldiers. Sometimes their inexperience bordered on incompetence, with disastrous results. What is most surprising about this arrangement is the number of politicians who actually turned out to be pretty good generals.

Legates and tribunes came and went fairly rapidly, and thus continuity and professionalism in the Roman army were provided not by the senior officers but by the junior ones, who were called centurions. Each legion had 60 centurions, who were promoted from the ranks and thus represented the best and most experienced of the soldiers. Among them, there was a strict hierarchy of seniority.

In the modern US Army, the centurions would be the equivalent of sergeants, and they were the ones who supervised and trained the men.



The equipment of legionaries was standardized and reflected their role as heavy infantry. For protecting the chest, Romans by the early imperial period had body armor called a *lorica segmentata*, consisting of bands of steel tied together with leather strips. To guard his head, he had a distinctive helmet, with cheek guards to protect the face, an extension at the back to cover the neck, and a reinforcing bar across the front to help save his skull from chopping blows from above.

In their left hand, legionaries held a large shield called a *scutum*. It was three or four feet high, two or three feet wide, rectangular in shape, and the middle of the shield curved slightly outward so that the legionary could hide his body within the curvature.

The Roman legionary had two main offensive weapons. First was the famous Roman short sword, the *gladius*. It is edged on both sides and can be used to cut, but it is most deadly as a thrusting weapon intended to inflict deep injuries that are lethal. Made for combat at close quarters, it is simply designed to kill in the most efficient manner possible. It is not a flashy or romantic type of sword, but—like the Romans themselves—it is highly practical.

Each legionary also carried two spears called *pila*. The heads of these were designed with a narrow steel shaft so that they would bend on impact, preventing enemies from picking them up and throwing them back at the Romans.

In battle, legions would advance to close range and throw their spears in unison; then, they would draw their swords, march forward, and chop their foes to pieces. Because of the discipline and organization of the Roman military system, they routinely defeated much larger numbers of

enemies who battled in less coordinated ways. This was because the Romans fought together as a tightly massed group—where each man supported and protected his comrades—rather than as individuals.

Each legion was given a number and a name. Sometimes the name referred to the place where the legion had been raised; other times the legion was named after the person who raised it or was given a descriptive or menacing name.



The design of Roman legions' marching camps was copied by Roman surveyors when building new cities, and many modern European cities can trace their street grid back to their origins as legionary encampments.

Even though these camps were abandoned after only one night's occupancy, they were built so well that today it is possible to fly overhead and detect the outlines of the marching camps, and archaeologists have found that they can trace Roman campaigns by following the trail of camps.

One notable characteristic of the Roman legions was the marching camp. When a legion was in the field traveling through unsettled territory, every night the soldiers would build an elaborate camp. They would clear a series of roads, with the two main roads forming a cross and dividing the camp into four quadrants. The other roads were laid out on a grid pattern.

Another characteristic of the Roman soldier was that he was a great digger, and every soldier carried a pickaxe called the *dolabra*, which was as essential as his *gladius* and was used much more often. The Romans' ability as diggers made them particularly efficient at conducting sieges. Many Roman military units spent the majority of their time engaged in building public works rather than fighting, and innumerable Roman roads and bridges were constructed by the military.

Perhaps the paramount characteristic of the Roman army was discipline. Above all else, soldiers were expected to do their duty, and if they failed, the penalties were predictably harsh. Offences such as insubordination or falling asleep while on watch were punished by death.

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QUESTIONS

1. Which central characteristic of the Roman army—discipline or organization—do you think was most vital to its success?
2. While the Roman army gets a lot of attention for its military triumphs, how important do you think its social role was in incorporating provincials, such as Apion, into the empire?

The organization, professionalism, and discipline of Rome's military were the keys to its success and made it a model for countless future armies.



BARBARIANS OVERWHELM THE WESTERN EMPIRE

LECTURE 20

Rome had been fighting various northern barbarian groups almost since the city had been founded. During the era of the republic, figures such as Marius had combatted Germanic invaders, and Julius Caesar had conquered the Gauls. During the early empire, clashes—and sometimes full-scale wars—against innumerable barbarian nations along the Rhine and Danube frontiers had been a constant preoccupation. But the existence of the empire itself had rarely, if ever, been threatened, and no hostile barbarian had set foot in the city of Rome for eight centuries. All of this would change at the end of the 4th century, however, when the barbarians became a more serious menace.

In the late 4th through 5th centuries AD, the peoples commonly referred to as barbarians invaded—or, some would say, migrated into—the Roman Empire in hitherto unprecedented numbers.

The term “barbarian” was originally a Greek one simply meaning those who could not speak Greek, but it eventually became a pejorative label used by the Greeks and Romans to denote almost any group they regarded as less civilized than themselves.

During the republic and early empire, the nations labeled as “barbarians” who fought against Rome in Gaul, Germany, Spain, Britain, and the Balkans were not one unified society or civilization, but were instead dozens of separate tribes, each with its own specific culture, traditions, language, and religious practices.

Most barbarian groups shared a few fundamental differences from the Romans. These male-dominated societies tended to be mostly either nomadic or seminomadic, and their political structure tended to be tribal. They tended to be warlike and expended most of their energies fighting one another.

Goths, Huns, and the Battle of Adrianople

The first major indication of this new age came on August 9, AD 378, when the eastern emperor Valens led a Roman army into combat against an invading force of Goths near the city of Adrianople in Thrace. Even though the western Roman emperor, Gratian, was rushing to the scene with another Roman army to trap the Goths between them, Valens did not want to share credit for the victory and therefore foolishly did not wait for the reinforcements to arrive. Instead, he pushed his army precipitously into battle, marching them all morning over hot, dusty terrain without a break.

When his tired and thirsty troops finally reached the Gothic encampment in the midafternoon, they were no match for the barbarians. The entire Roman army was wiped out, and Valens himself fell on the battlefield. Valens's death was an ominous portent of the future. Although several Roman emperors had died while fighting the large, sophisticated empires of the east, this was the first time that the supposedly uncivilized northern barbarians had slain a Roman emperor.

The Battle of Adrianople was a disaster for Rome, and it demonstrated that the empire was vulnerable to sizable barbarian invasions. The Gothic migration that led to the battle had been on a larger scale than most previous barbarian incursions. What had brought the Goths into conflict with Rome was the actions of yet another barbarian group, the Huns, who have enjoyed a reputation since antiquity as being one of the fiercest.



The Huns were nomads who roamed the central Asian steppe, were outstanding horsemen and archers, and were much feared for the ferocity of their raids.



Sometime during the 4th century AD, the Huns began to migrate steadily westward out of their traditional homelands, moving into the territory of another group, the Alans. After defeating the Alans and incorporating many of them into their army, the Huns advanced farther westward, encroaching on the lands of the Gothic Greuthungi. They in turn were defeated, with many fleeing westward ahead of the Huns.

The next Gothic tribe to be menaced by the Huns was the Tervingi, who lived on the borders of the Roman Empire. When they, too, were unable to cope with the Huns, they sent a request to Emperor Valens, seeking permission, together with refugees from the Greuthungi, to cross the Danube and take refuge within Roman territory.

Valens agreed to admit them and provide foodstuffs, in return for military service on behalf of the empire. However, corrupt local Roman officials shamelessly cheated the Goths and failed to deliver the promised goods. Relations broke down, and the outcome was the Battle of Adrianople.

The Huns set in motion a colossal domino effect that spanned Asia and Europe, displacing one group after another, and the ultimate result of these movements was intensified barbarian pressure on the Roman Empire.

Julian to Theodosius

After the death of Julian the Apostate in AD 363, power in the Roman Empire fell into the hands of the military, who selected the next several emperors. In keeping with recent trends, they also tended to elevate pairs of men, with one serving as emperor over the eastern half of the empire and the other acting as western emperor.

In the years leading up to the Battle of Adrianople in 378, the pair was Valentinian in the east and Valens in the west. Valentinian, the senior, had managed to stay in power for quite a while, ruling since AD 364 and successfully fending off a number of crises.

In AD 375, Valentinian suffered a paralytic stroke and died. His replacement was Gratian, the man whom Valens was unwilling to share credit with, leading to his own death at Adrianople. Valens was succeeded by Theodosius, who would rule until AD 395.

All of these emperors after Julian were Christian, but for the most part they had been fairly tolerant of paganism and had not banned traditional forms of worship. There were still many pagans in the empire, and an interesting moment of conflict arose during the rule of Theodosius.



Valens

Settling on who should be Theodosius's coemperor for the western empire sparked a complicated series of struggles among different contenders. Eventually, the dominant figure who emerged was a Frankish general named Arbogast. By this point, it was common for barbarians to serve in Rome's armies, and Arbogast is an example of how far such men could rise. Due to his barbarian origins, however, he would have had trouble being accepted as an official emperor, so he put forward a man named Eugenius to serve as a figurehead while he would act as the power behind the throne.

Arbogast and Eugenius seem to have contemplated reviving paganism and, as a result, came into conflict with Theodosius. The ensuing Battle of the Frigidus River in AD 394 was won by Theodosius, who then officially banned pagan worship. From then on, Christianity would be the unchallenged official religion of the empire.

Alaric and the Sack of Rome

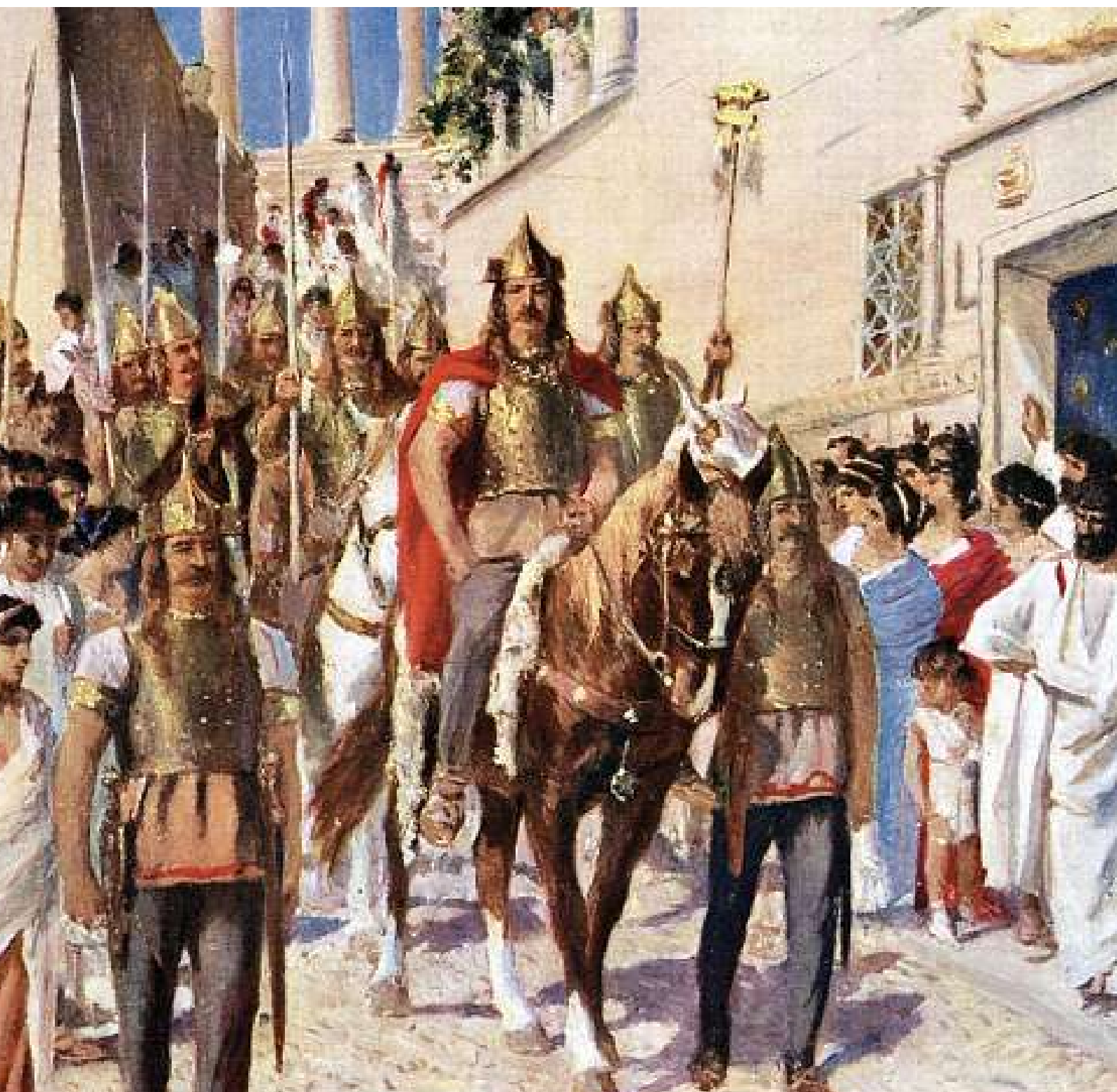
In the decades following the death of Theodosius in AD 395, most of the emperors were drawn from the ranks of his sons, grandsons, and nephews, but many of these were still just children, and—as it had under the Severans—the empire witnessed a period when real power resided in the hands of a sequence of powerful women, related by blood and marriage, who manipulated events through their children, brothers, or husbands. This able group of women, under whose supervision the empire continued in a reasonably prosperous manner, included Galla Placidia, Eudoxia, and Pulcheria.

The other major development during this time was the growing prominence of generals, such as Arbogast, who had barbarian origins. After his defeat at the Frigidus River, Arbogast had committed suicide, but another man with a similar background would play a central role in politics during this time. This was Stilicho, the son of the union between a Roman woman and a Vandal serving as an officer in the Roman army.

This was an era of intense political infighting and maneuvering among the many factions vying for power within the empire. Not infrequently, barbarian tribes and leaders would be recruited by one faction or another, given Roman titles and privileges, and then employed in civil wars.

There was also a growing tendency for the eastern and western halves of the empire to turn inward and focus on their own problems, failing to cooperate when common threats appeared and refusing to support one another. All of this was complicated even further by continued external pressure from barbarian tribes on the frontiers and economic crises within the empire.

In the early 400s, one of the most important barbarian warlords who became enmeshed in Roman politics was a Visigoth named Alaric. In AD 410, Alaric and a band of Visigoths marched down into Italy, captured Rome, and looted the capital for three days.



Although the damage to the city was not severe and Alaric and the Visigoths soon departed with their plunder, the psychological effect of this blow was immense. For the first time in more than 800 years, a foreign enemy had occupied the traditional capital of the empire.

The sack of Rome plainly advertised just how weak the empire, or at least the western half of it, had become—a message that other barbarian tribes would be quick to take note of.

The city of Rome was invested with profound symbolic significance for the Romans, and their failure to protect it made plain the reduced state of Roman power as nothing else could have.

The Collapse of the West and Attila the Hun

Numerous barbarian tribes swiftly took advantage of the weakness of the western empire, migrating into Roman provinces, carving them off, and establishing their own kingdoms in what had formerly been Roman territory.

In the 450s, the Huns came sweeping into western Europe, leaving a path of devastation in their wake. What made the Huns especially menacing was that, unusually, the various Hunnic tribes had united under a single strong leader, Attila the Hun.

Alliances in this period were continually and rapidly shifting, and relationships between the western empire and various barbarian nations were similarly complicated. It is not a simple story of barbarians versus Romans, but rather of constantly changing factions and temporary agreements made among and between individuals and groups spanning all the cultures of the era.

So terrifying were the Huns that an unlikely coalition formed to oppose them, consisting of the Western Roman Empire and the Visigoths, joined by elements of the Franks, Burgundians, Alans, and Saxons. Against them were Attila, the Huns, and other factions of Franks, Burgundians, and Goths. In 451, they fought a bitter battle on the Catalaunian Plains in France that ended in a stalemate, but it was enough to, at least temporarily, stop Attila's advance.

The next year, the Huns went straight for Rome, intending to plunder and destroy it. However, in a rather mysterious episode, Pope Leo I went out to meet them, and Attila and the pope ate lunch together on the banks of a river in northern Italy. At the end of this unlikely luncheon, Attila announced that the Huns were going back north to Gaul. No one is quite sure what the Pope said to Attila.

Fortunately for Rome, Attila died in 453, and without his leadership, the Huns splintered into small groups and would never again pose as serious a threat.

The western empire was on its last legs, however. In AD 455, the Vandals, under their warlike king Gaiseric, sailed up the Tiber River and captured Rome, sacking it much more thoroughly and destructively than Alaric had done earlier that century. Still, the western empire continued to limp along, and there was still officially a Roman emperor, even if he no longer ruled over much. Various barbarian warlords continued to exercise great influence within Roman politics and over the emperors.



A new phase was initiated in the mid-470s, when the notional western emperor was Romulus Augustulus, who, in AD 476, was deposed by yet another barbarian serving in the Roman army. This officer, named Odovacer, then broke with precedent by declining to install a new puppet emperor, instead simply declaring himself the King of Italy. From now on, barbarian kings would control the territories that had once constituted the western half of the Roman Empire.

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QUESTIONS

1. How did internal problems in the Roman Empire contribute to its vulnerability to barbarian migrations/invasions? Could these problems have been avoided?
2. Is it surprising to you that barbarian warlords such as Arbogast, Stilicho, and Alaric seem to have fought on the side of various Roman factions as often as they fought against the Romans? If so, why is the popular narrative that stresses Romans versus barbarians so compelling?

While the western half of the Roman Empire had been succumbing to political infighting and the repeated hammer blows of barbarian attacks, the east had benefited from having a shorter northern frontier to defend, a higher concentration of wealth-producing cities, and the impregnable city of Constantinople as its capital.

While staggered by many of the same challenges that had brought down the west, the story of the eastern empire is very different. It endured and would continue under an unbroken chain of Roman emperors for another 1,000 years.



THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

LECTURE 21

By the end of the 5th century AD, the Western Roman Empire centered on Rome had fallen—or, at the very least, had been transformed into something that was no longer truly fully Roman. On the other side of the Mediterranean, the Eastern Roman Empire, with its capital at Constantinople, would continue to flourish for another 1,000 years. Although they viewed themselves as simply “the Romans,” later historians have labeled this empire the Byzantine Empire, after the original name of the old Greek colony, Byzantium, located at the site where Constantinople would later be built. Today, the same city is now Istanbul in Turkey.

Constantinople, the Eastern Capital City

Established by Constantine in the 4th century to be the eastern capital of the empire, Constantinople sits exactly at the border between Europe and Asia overlooking the Bosphorus, the narrow strip of water that both links the Mediterranean Sea to the Black Sea and separates Europe from Asia.

By geography, Constantinople is situated at, and commands, a vital economic and strategic crossroads. The main trade routes connecting east to west and north to south converge at this single point. Constantinople was not only a key transportation node but also a frontier or border zone. It was in the streets and bazaars of this city that the ideas and cultures of east and west met and intermingled.

Somewhat like a northern version of Alexandria in Egypt, Constantinople possessed a mixture of civilizations that gave it a uniquely cosmopolitan and worldly character and enriched the intellectual life of the city.



Because the city was on a stretch of high ground surrounded on three sides by the waters of the Sea of Marmara, the Bosphorus, and the Golden Horn, Constantinople was highly defensible. It could only be approached by land on its western side, and its inhabitants constructed some of the most massive fortifications of antiquity along this one vulnerable approach. The walls that protected this great city were built and rebuilt by a succession of emperors, but by the 6th century, they comprised an impressive set of fortifications.

Constantine built Constantinople self-consciously as an imitation of Rome and thus bestowed upon it all the sorts of structures that one found in the western capital, such as palaces, temples, and arenas for chariot racing.



Constantinople's location made it a beautiful city. Even today, when you approach it by sea, you are greeted with a spectacular vista of spires and buildings rising up above the shimmering water.

One architectural feature of the city that differed from Rome, but was equally impressive, was its water supply. Rome possessed a famous system of aqueducts, which brought fresh water from far off, but Constantinople, designed with more concern for resisting attack, required an internal source of fresh water. The solution was the construction of enormous underground cisterns.



In AD 421, one of Constantinople's cisterns was excavated that could hold 66 million cubic gallons of water, and a century later, the emperor Justinian added another with a capacity of a further 20 million gallons. This later cistern still exists under the city and is now a popular tourist attraction.

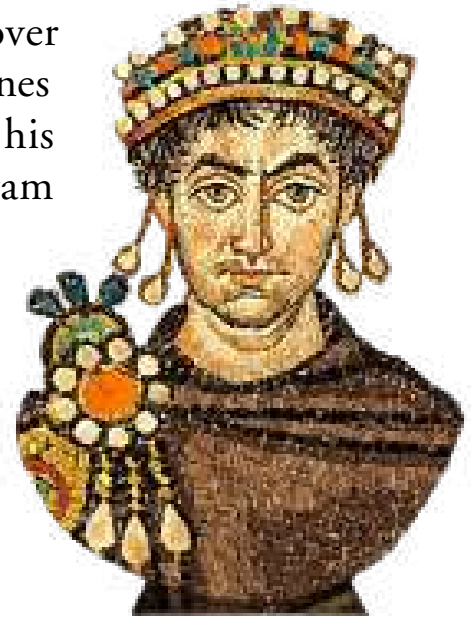
You can wander over catwalks placed above the water in a vast cavern whose roof is held up by 336 columns arranged in 28 rows. Many of these are mounted atop chunks of marble recycled from earlier buildings, most famously a set of gigantic Medusa heads. It is well worth a visit if you are in Istanbul.



Justinian and Theodora

Of the approximately 95 emperors who ruled over Constantinople, the most significant of the earlier ones was Justinian, who succeeded his uncle Justin upon his death in 527. Justinian embarked on an energetic program of building, organization, and conquest.

Despite his ties to the former emperor, Justinian was something of an outsider among the aristocrats of Constantinople, and he appointed a number of people to important positions based more on energy and ability than on family connections. This gave him a core of talented subordinates who were able to carry out his ambitious schemes but also earned the enmity of the old aristocracy.



Making things worse was his choice of wife. Justinian married a woman several decades younger than himself named Theodora, who apparently came from the lower classes. She seems to have been an intelligent and strong-willed woman who took an active role in government and was a key advisor and helper to Justinian. She assumed a public role in policy making and was a forceful advocate for women's rights. All of this, however, made her a target for resentment and criticism.

In AD 532, early in his reign, Justinian faced a crisis that almost deposed him from office. In the hippodrome, the traditional chariot-racing factions—the Greens and the Blues—had always engaged in a fierce rivalry that not infrequently resulted in riots and violence. Adding to the intensity was the fact that, around this time, these factions had become associated with rival sects of Christianity.

When Justinian refused to pardon two criminals, one from each faction, the Blues and Greens joined forces and rioted. The subsequent urban violence spilled out of the hippodrome and into the streets, and the factions then attempted to replace Justinian as emperor with another man.

This incident was known as the Nika riot because one of the traditional shouts of the factions at chariot races was *nika*, meaning “victory.” Things escalated to the point where much of the city was burned to the ground, and the anarchy continued for a week.

Justinian was reportedly on the brink of fleeing the city when his courage was rallied by the determination of Theodora, who berated him and convinced him to stay and oppose the rioters. He ended up suppressing the unrest and reasserting his authority by calling in the army, with the result that allegedly 30,000 people were killed by the troops.

Despite this somewhat unpromising start, Justinian and Theodora would accomplish some impressive achievements. One of these was to nearly reunite the Eastern and Western Roman Empires by conquering many of the barbarian kingdoms that had taken over the western Mediterranean.

For a brief time, the Roman Empire of Justinian approached its one-time unified size. But these campaigns cost considerable amounts of money, and the empire's resources were further dissipated by a string of serious conflicts with the Middle East–based Sassanians, who remained a powerful and warlike empire.

As glorious as Justinian's reunification might have appeared at the time, and as notable an achievement as it was, like many conquests, it would be both short-lived and relatively inconsequential in its permanent effects. Fairly soon after Justinian's death, almost all of the western Mediterranean territories were once again lost to various barbarian kingdoms. From this point on, the Byzantine Empire would be confined exclusively to the eastern Mediterranean, and even in that region, its geographic extent steadily contracted over time.

In the long run, the single most wide-ranging and influential effect of the Roman world on the modern one might be in the realm of law, where the Code of Justinian—a compilation of Roman law running to more than 100 volumes—laid the foundation for almost all modern legal systems.

The Byzantine Empire was struck by a particularly bad outbreak of plague in the 540s, and even Emperor Justinian caught the disease, although he survived it. Theodora died young in 548, but Justinian continued to rule until his death in AD 565.

At Constantinople, Justinian embarked on a great building program, particularly after the destruction wrought by the Nika riot. Among the buildings erected at this time was one of the most awe inspiring in all of history, and it still impresses visitors today.

This was the church known as the Hagia Sophia, which was inaugurated on December 26, AD 537. Not only is this a simply massive edifice covering nearly 60,000 square feet, but it is also an architectural marvel centered around a colossal dome suspended above a great square boxlike structure.

Unfortunately, the dome collapsed 20 years after completion, but it was rebuilt to a strengthened design. When Constantinople was eventually captured by the Ottoman Turks, the Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque, and accordingly, minarets were added. Today, it retains these features but is officially a museum.



Since Justinian had no direct heir, his sister's son became the next emperor. He and his successors were part of a line of emperors that ruled all the way through the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. While still considering itself Roman, the Byzantine Empire in many ways would revert to the underlying Greek roots of the east, which had remained intact throughout the Roman occupations.

Heraclius and the Rise of Islam

Another key figure in Byzantine history came soon after Justinian, in the early 7th century: Emperor Heraclius, a general who rebelled against the current emperor, Phocas, and deposed him. Heraclius led Byzantium to one of its greatest triumphs over its longstanding Persian rival, the Sassanian empire. The war between these two rivals lasted almost 20 years and included a number of spectacular successes and disasters on both sides.

Part of the reason why the Byzantine Empire managed to survive so much longer after the fall of the western empire was that the eastern empire enjoyed a number of advantages over the west.

- ✦ The eastern empire had a much shorter northern border to defend against barbarian invasions, so it could both concentrate its troops on the frontier and react more quickly when there was a breakthrough.
- ✦ The huge walls and highly defensible geographic position of Constantinople discouraged attacks in the first place, causing some potential foes to look elsewhere for easier prey.
- ✦ The eastern half of the Roman Empire had always been the much more heavily urbanized—and, hence, wealthier—section, so the Byzantine emperors simply had greater financial resources to draw upon than their western counterparts.

While the Byzantines and Sassanians were bleeding each other dry over the course of their prolonged and bitter struggle, a new power had emerged from one of the most obscure corners of the Mediterranean that, in a remarkably short period of time, would explode onto the scene and sweep away much of the previous world order.

In AD 610, a middle-aged merchant named Mohammed in the town of Mecca on the Arabian Peninsula began to experience visions in which the angel Gabriel appeared to him, imparted to him a series of revelations from God, and commanded him to recite them back. The collected lessons became known as the Qur'an ("Recitations"), and the religion that he founded was Islam.

The religion established by Mohammed advocated a stark form of monotheism in which the primacy of God as the one and only deity was stressed, and nothing was allowed to come between God and the worshipper. Acknowledgment of God's omnipotence and submitting oneself to his will were critical; this concept is reflected in the word "Islam," which can be translated as "submission."

Mohammed identified God—or, in Arabic, Allah—as the same God who was revered by the Jews and the Christians, and in Islam, figures such as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus are venerated as human prophets who had received earlier divine revelations. Mohammed, then, was believed to be the last in this line of prophets and had been granted the fullest and most accurate version of God's message.

Mohammed gathered around him a group from Mecca of converts to the new religion, but the people among whom Islam really took hold were the hardy nomadic Arab tribes of the surrounding desert. By the time of Mohammed's death in AD 632, Islam had spread throughout these tribes, and over the next 30 years, under the leadership of Mohammed's four caliphs, or "successors," these tribes erupted into the Mediterranean world and conquered vast territories.

The long Byzantine-Sassanian wars had exhausted both sides and left these once-powerful empires vulnerable. Heraclius fought gamely but was unable to stem the tide and had to endure watching one section of his empire lost after another.



At the Battle of Yarmouk in 636, the Byzantine army was decisively defeated, and in the same year, the Sassanians were crushed at the Battle of al-Qadisiyyah, leaving the entire east open to invasion and conquest by the Arabs.

In 636, Byzantium lost Jerusalem, the most sacred city in Christendom, and soon after, the entire Sassanian empire crumbled and was brushed aside by the newcomers. Egypt fell in 642, and the southern Mediterranean coast, encompassing what is today Libya and Tunisia, soon followed.

The Byzantine Empire still held Constantinople and sections of the Balkans and Anatolia, and this much-reduced version of the empire would manage to continue for another 800 years. Heraclius lived to witness most of these losses, finally dying in AD 641.

This great wave of subjugation finally subsided in the mid-8th century, by which time the remainder of North Africa and Spain had been subdued in the west and the Islamic armies had reached the borders of India in the east. The Arabic conquests fundamentally reshaped the Mediterranean world and created religious, cultural, and linguistic boundaries that still persist today.

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QUESTIONS

1. The Byzantine Empire under emperors like Justinian and Heraclius expended considerable resources on attempts to reestablish the earlier borders of the Roman Empire that were ultimately unsuccessful. Do you think this policy was justified under the rationale that an empire must expand or wither, or should they have concentrated on holding on to a smaller empire?
2. Do you believe that the Byzantine Empire was a true continuation of the Roman Empire, or should it be regarded as a separate entity? Explain your answer.

Throughout the early centuries of the Byzantine Empire, the Christian world was racked by disagreements over theological doctrine. The Byzantine Empire and the east developed its own version of Christianity and split off from the west, forming the Greek Orthodox Church. In the west, the Pope presided over what would develop into the Roman Catholic Church, while in the east, the Patriarch was the spiritual leader of the Greek Orthodox Church. This division still exists today.

Politically, the Byzantine Empire experienced something of a resurgence in the 9th through 11th centuries under a set of emperors who are sometimes called the Macedonian dynasty. These rulers managed to defeat the neighboring kingdom of Bulgaria and push the northern border of the Byzantine Empire back up to the line of the Danube. To the east, their armies recaptured all of Asia Minor as far as Armenia, and in the Mediterranean, they held Greece and even bits of southern Italy.

In subsequent centuries, the power and reach of the Byzantine Empire waned, but—safe behind its great walls—the city of Constantinople persisted. It played a key role as a staging point for the Crusades and for centuries served as a bulwark protecting Europe from eastern invaders.

Then, in one of the most ignominious episodes of the Crusades, the Christian army of the Fourth Crusade duplicitously turned against Constantinople and sacked the city. Fatally weakened by this betrayal, as well as by further declines in its fortunes, Constantinople was finally captured by the Ottoman sultan Mehmet II on May 29, 1453, at last bringing the history of the Eastern Roman Empire to an end almost 1,000 years after the fall of Rome and the western empire.



WHEN AND WHY DID THE ROMAN EMPIRE FALL?

LECTURE 22

In the 2nd century AD, when it was at the height of its power, the Roman Empire ruled confidently and serenely over the entire Mediterranean basin with a seemingly stable and prosperous economy, a wise government, an advanced legal system, a powerful military, and a sophisticated culture. According to the conventional view, however, within a few centuries, this glorious and powerful structure would totter, crumble, and vanish, taking with it the best of its achievements and sophistication and leaving behind a reduced and coarser world that was doomed to stumble through centuries of medieval squalor before the Renaissance rekindled the light of learning and culture. Because of the central role that Rome played in Western culture, people from the Middle Ages onward have been fascinated by the puzzle of how and why such a mighty empire could have collapsed.

When Did Rome Fall?

One of the first problems encountered when attempting to analyze the fall of Rome is that no one can seem to agree on exactly when it happened. Depending on which history book one consults, one encounters a bewildering array of dates identified as when Rome “fell,” ranging from the 1st century BC all the way up through the 15th century AD. Even more confusing is the fact that most of these authors can offer reasonably plausible justifications for the date he or she has selected.

While there is a good argument to be made for the 15th-century date, the overwhelming majority of dates for the fall of Rome cluster in a much shorter time span of a few hundred years, between the late 2nd and late 5th centuries AD. But there are some early outliers.

Some have argued that 31 BC, and the Battle of Actium, marks the beginning of the end for Rome. Proponents of this date tend to be ardent admirers of the Roman Republic and thus see Octavian’s victory over Mark Antony as sounding the death knell of the republic, and they believe that everything inevitably went downhill from there. Occasionally, 27 BC—the date of Octavian’s political settlement and establishment of the principate—is substituted for 31 BC, but the basic argument is the same. Most historians, however, seem to accept that despite the switch from republic to empire, Roman civilization not only continued, but did not reach a peak until about a century later, during the reign of the so-called five good emperors.

The end of this era gives rise to the first of the most frequently suggested dates for the fall of Rome: the death of the philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius in AD 180 and the accession to the throne of his mentally unstable son, Commodus. The appeal of this date is that it marks a clear demarcation between a period that is usually regarded as the golden age of Rome and a time when the empire was challenged by a variety of disasters, both internal and external. Within a few decades of the death of Aurelius, the empire plunged into the turbulent period of the so-called crisis of the third century. Thus, although the empire clearly continued for some time, AD 180 is often cited as the moment from which affairs assumed an irreversible downward momentum. However, although it seemed that the crisis of the 3rd century would result in Rome's certain demise, events took an unexpected turn late in that century, when Diocletian and other military emperors managed to restore order, drive off the barbarians, and stabilize the empire.



AD 180, with the death of Marcus Aurelius, seems to be the date favored by Hollywood for the fall of Rome. It is the focal point of several high-profile films, including the 1964 classic *The Fall of the Roman Empire* and the 2000 Oscar-winning epic *Gladiator*.

The next popular date for the fall of Rome comes shortly thereafter, at the beginning of the 4th century AD, when there were again civil wars, one of which ended in 312 with Constantine emerging as the victor and becoming the first emperor to convert to Christianity. Proponents of this date stress that the personal, inward-looking ideology of Christianity was fundamentally antithetical to the outward, public focus of Roman civilization. The values of Christianity supplanted those of classical paganism, and thus the conversion of Constantine can be seen as demarcating a fundamental fault line in the history of Rome.

The next set of dates focuses around invasions by various barbarian tribes whose activities intensified during the 4th and 5th centuries.

The calamitous defeat and death of the Roman emperor Valens at the hands of the Goths in AD 378 at the Battle of Adrianople has been put forward as the date demonstrating the moment when the western empire proved incapable of dealing with the threat posed by the barbarians. At the very least, Adrianople exposed the weakness of the once-invincible Roman legions and pointed the way to the future, when the dominant military and political powers would be northern tribal nations.

The next date frequently put forward as the moment when Rome fell is AD 410, when King Alaric of the Visigoths invaded Italy, captured the city of Rome, and sacked the ancient capital. Even if the actual damage was limited, there is no denying that in symbolic terms this was a devastating blow to the image of Rome, and for this reason, many have found 410 to be a compelling date. Others have preferred the slightly later, but more severe, sack and looting of Rome by Gaiseric and the Vandals, which occurred in AD 455.

The third major barbarian-related date for the end of Rome is AD 476, when the last supposedly legitimate western emperor, Romulus Augustulus, was deposed by Odoacer, who then proclaimed himself King of Italy.

WHO COUNTS AS A ROMAN?

Some scholars have tried to solve the debate of when Rome fell by focusing on when “legitimate” or “real” Romans passed from the scene, dismissing many of the later rulers as barbarians masquerading as Romans. This, however, raises the complicated question of who counts as a “real” Roman.

- ✦ If one looks at place of origin, for much of Rome’s history, its emperors, senators, and legionaries were in reality a mixture of people from Italy, Europe, Africa, and the eastern provinces. It is very difficult to identify a concrete moment when those in charge switched from being Romans to being barbarians.
- ✦ If one defines “Romanness” by ethnicity or geography, then Rome had been ruled by non-Romans for centuries, but if one defines it by culture, then one could argue for a Roman Empire that perhaps never fell.
- ✦ If one accepts the Eastern, or Byzantine, Empire and its rulers as being Romans, a legitimate argument can be made that the Roman Empire did not fall until 1453, when Constantinople at last fell to the Ottoman Turks.
- ✦ If one looks at continuity of titles or self-proclaimed heirs to the Roman Empire, one can push dates for Rome’s fall nearly to the present. Throughout the Middle Ages, there was a continuous string of Holy Roman Emperors until the last one was deposed by Napoleon in 1806. The Russian tsars regarded themselves as heirs to the Roman legacy, and the last tsar ruled until the Russian Revolution in 1917.
- ✦ If one counts the United States as a revived Roman Republic—after all, the founding fathers used the Roman Republic as a model of government—then one could argue that Rome continues today.

Even this long list—spanning almost 2,000 years—by no means exhausts the range of possible dates that can be, and have been, proposed as the end of the Roman Empire.

Why Did Rome Fall?

There is certainly no shortage of proposed explanations for the decline and fall of Rome. Many of the suggested dates for Rome's fall center around one of the most prominent of these explanations: that the Roman Empire was essentially sound but that it fell to repeated and overwhelming attacks by barbarians in both the eastern and western empires. This is an interpretation that is essentially military in nature—that there was a conflict and the Romans' force of arms proved inferior to that of the enemies they faced.

Another set of explanations concentrates on economic circumstances. Some hypothesize that there was a decline in arable land or in available workers, resulting either way in reduced taxes and economic strains. Others find evidence for a growing inequality between rich and poor or a disengagement of local elites from public life, with an attendant redirection of resources and diminished civic patronage. The 3rd through 6th centuries also saw a number of economic crises, with periods of severe inflation and debasement of currency. Barbarian incursions, civil wars, and increased size of the military all would have served to disrupt the economy.

The French historian André Piganiol famously wrote, "Roman Civilization did not die a natural death. It was murdered."

The English historian Edward Gibbon, who wrote *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, stated, "The Roman world was overwhelmed by a deluge of barbarians."

The emergence of Christianity as the dominant religion has frequently been linked with the decline of Roman power.

In economic terms, the Christian Church acquired large tracts of land and kept the income from these for its own purposes, thus reducing the resources of the state. Monks, nuns, hermits, and members of the church hierarchy added up to large numbers of people who were, at least partially, economic parasites on society and had to be supported by the labor of others. The triumphant Christian Church devoted effort to suppressing paganism, but even more resources were squandered in bitter rivalries and persecutions among different sects of Christianity.

In psychological terms, it has been argued that Christianity, with its emphasis on the next life and on finding personal salvation, undermined traditional Roman virtues of service to the state and civic engagement. Christianity offered an alternate power structure, social hierarchy, and value system that competed with those of the old Roman world for allegiance and talent.

Some interpreters of Rome's history have subscribed to a kind of biological model, in which all nations, just like human beings, will inevitably go through a natural progression of birth, growth, maturity, decline, and death. In this view, nothing ever remains constant, but must follow an inevitable cycle.

In recent years, explanations that focus on environmental factors have been especially prominent. Some of these ascribe not only Rome's fall to changes in climate, but its rise as well, arguing that the Roman Empire was only able to attain the size that it did because Roman imperialism had the good fortune to coincide with a period of unusually warm, wet, and stable climate across the Mediterranean basin that began around the 3rd century BC and lasted until the mid-2nd century AD—precisely the time of rapid Roman political and economic expansion. The adherents of this view, who have cited an impressively wide range of scientific data to support it, suggest that this fortuitous era is largely responsible for allowing the density of population that in turn enabled the growth and prosperity of the empire.

An alternative approach to the question of why Rome fell is to find merit in a number of these interpretations and accordingly ascribe the fall of Rome to a set of circumstances rather than to one in particular. While the specific favored constellation of factors varies from one scholar to another, followers of this approach all generally subscribe to the idea that the fall of Rome is far too complex a phenomenon to be attributed to a single cause but that it can be adequately explained as the confluence of a number of different trends.

READINGS

Goldsworthy, *How Rome Fell*.

Harper, *The Fate of Rome*.

Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*.

QUESTIONS

1. Which of the many proposed dates for the fall of the Roman Empire do you find most compelling? Why?
2. Which of the many proposed reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire do you find most compelling? Why?

Whether due to barbarians, environment, economic collapse, Christianity, or some combination of factors, all of these interpretations of the fall of the Roman Empire still center around the core assumption that a powerful civilization fell and that the history of this era is essentially one of decay and decline.

But in recent decades, even this basic premise has been challenged, and some historians have chosen to highlight elements of culture during this period where there was dynamic growth and innovation. This analysis casts doubt on the entire notion of decline and fall.



LATE ANTIQUITY: A NEW HISTORICAL ERA

LECTURE 23

Prior to the 1970s, the messy span of centuries between approximately AD 200 and 600 had often been regarded with less interest than the plainly identifiable Roman age that preceded it and the medieval one that followed. This era was not even known by a clear designation; some stretched the medieval period backward and called it the “early” Middle Ages, while others lumped it in with the Roman period and labeled it the “later” Roman Empire. In 1971, the historian Peter Brown published *The World of Late Antiquity*, which argued that these centuries—which he labeled “late antiquity”—formed a distinct and vital time period that deserved to be treated on its own and not merely as a gloomy postscript to the classical world or as an untidy prelude to the Middle Ages. The study of late antiquity has since exploded, and it is now generally recognized as a separate and important time that was neither stagnant nor simple. Instead, the developments of late antiquity are vital to understanding the world that emerged from it—which, in many respects, continues to exist today.

Some of the key changes in the reconceptualization of late antiquity were to obsess less over the aspects of Roman culture that were destroyed and to focus more on the new cultures that were created as well as to concentrate less on the battles between barbarians and Romans and more on the complex interactions between them.

The historian Peter Brown does not ignore or deny the collapse of the western empire and the economic challenges of the time, but he shifts the emphasis from decline to change and from fall to transformation. Above all, Brown and other scholars of this era stress the innovation that occurred then.

One topic in particular that Brown and others afforded special emphasis in their writings was religious developments in late antiquity. The history of religion in late antiquity is especially rich and includes a number of the intellectual giants of the Christian tradition.

Romans and Barbarians

The Germanic and other barbarian tribes that arrived in the Mediterranean world from AD 200 to 600 established their own kingdoms and introduced their own cultures, fundamentally transforming the classical world that they had supplanted. This was not a simple story of one culture replacing another, however, because the barbarians themselves were profoundly influenced and changed by the Roman civilization that they had apparently conquered.

Perhaps the most significant form that this Romanization of the barbarians took was the gradual conversion to Christianity of the formerly pagan tribes. Just as the classical pantheon of gods was replaced by Christian monotheism, worship of the old northern, pagan deities faded away and Christianity steadily spread throughout both the Mediterranean world and Europe.

Also, many of the titles, political structures, and institutions established by the Romans either endured or were copied. Latin—and, in the east, Greek—survived and remained vital languages, particularly in the fields of law, the Church, diplomacy, and government.

In assessing the history of late antiquity, it is too simplistic to fixate on a supposed struggle to the death between Romans and barbarians, not least because the barbarians were often invited within the borders of the empire by the Romans themselves, who hoped to enlist them as allies.

The old view of waves of hostile barbarian invasions beating against the Roman frontiers has been complicated by recent studies that stress accommodation and negotiation. Such studies have often focused on treaties drafted between Romans and barbarian groups in which the two sides amicably outlined a settlement by which the barbarians typically were granted territory, and often money, in exchange for military service. All this has led to a rethinking of previous assessments.

Even the terminology used to analyze this period has shifted, with the phrase “barbarian tribes” now often being replaced by less pejorative-sounding terms, such as “nations of northern peoples,” and the violent word “invasion” giving way to milder terms, such as “migration” or “settlement.”

Not only was the reality of “barbarian invasions” more complicated than previously depicted, but the division between Roman and barbarian was often blurred. With many barbarians fighting for Rome and holding Roman titles, it was often hard to tell who was really Roman and who was barbarian. In this liminal world, a number of the most important figures of this era slipped back and forth across the Roman/barbarian line and not infrequently even simultaneously held official positions in both camps.

Late antiquity was an era of cultural and political exchange and interaction among the various inheritors of the classical world.

Religious Innovation

Although such back-and-forth shifts of cultural and political allegiance can give the impression of a chaotic and confusing time, they are also characteristic of periods of change, when new institutions and ideas are being formed. Many of the institutions that developed in late antiquity have proven to be both important and long-standing. And nowhere is this truer than in the area of religion.

Although Christianity originated during classical antiquity and even became the dominant religion of the ancient Mediterranean, agreement over its ultimate doctrines and structure was much slower to develop. It was only during late antiquity that such core concepts as the nature of Christ and his relationship with God were hammered out through a series of long, and frequently acrimonious, debates.

Popes, bishops, and Christian intellectuals met in councils, traded letters, and wrote sophisticated treatises arguing various interpretations and theological positions. These were not merely esoteric exchanges among intellectuals, but vital discussions about the very nature, beliefs, and rituals of Christianity.



The period is punctuated with a series of all-church councils at which official dogma was determined and proclaimed. The judgments reached at these councils—such as the Nicene Creed, which was formulated at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325—became the basis for much of subsequent Christian doctrine. Often, the competing viewpoints could not be reconciled; this led to bitter schisms within the church, such as the Donatist heresy and the Arian controversy, which spawned vicious persecutions among rival Christian groups.

The great monastic movement that would flourish in the Middle Ages—building until tens, perhaps even hundreds, of thousands of monks and nuns were living according to the strict rules of the monastery or the nunnery—began during late antiquity in the 4th century with Saint Antony, who abandoned his earthly possessions and relationships and went out into the Egyptian desert to devote himself to a life of prayer.

Saint Antony's example would prove popular, and thus one of the great social and religious phenomena of history was born. The initial paradigm of monasticism established by Antony emphasized monks isolating themselves from other humans. This hermit model of monkhood was then supplemented by the notion of monks living communally.

The word “monk” is derived from the Greek term *monochus*, meaning “one who lives alone.”



The collective form of monasticism was institutionalized when various sets of rules governing monks' behavior were developed, most influentially by Saint Benedict during the 6th century. He founded the monastery of Monte Cassino in Italy and developed the Rule of St. Benedict, which regulated every aspect of monks' lives.

Monasticism would become one of the most significant features of medieval Christianity and would exert far-reaching social and religious effects. Other key religious movements that similarly had their origins during late antiquity include the cult of the saints, the adoration of relics, and asceticism.

Late antiquity is the era during which lived the towering Fathers of the Church, whose writings fundamentally defined Christian theology. Brilliant thinkers such as Augustine and Jerome pored over religious texts, engaged in lively debates, and authored their own interpretations, and it was from the crucible of their arguments that Christianity's doctrines crystallized.

In late antiquity, a new social fabric was woven together from the divergent threads of the old one.

The new religious and intellectual movements of late antiquity also offered opportunities for some traditionally disenfranchised groups to gain positions of respect and power. Many of the earliest converts to Christianity were slaves and women, and in Christianity's earliest phases, they sometimes occupied leadership roles in their local congregations.

During late antiquity, a number of women—including Melania the Younger and Hypatia of Alexandria—achieved prominence as Christian mystics, martyrs, and role models.

The adherents of a more positive view of late antiquity argue that too much emphasis has been placed on developments in the western Mediterranean and that more recognition should be accorded to the eastern half, where the continuing vitality of the Byzantine, or Eastern Roman, Empire was undeniable. Constantinople and its empire thrived, and some of its greatest achievements date to the late antique period; therefore, late antiquity cannot be dismissed solely as a time of stagnation and decline.

Controversy and Counterinterpretation

The positive interpretation of late antiquity eventually provoked a counterinterpretation among some scholars, who argue that the pendulum has now swung too far and that the rosy portraits of change and accommodation have glossed over much of the violence and genuine economic disruption of the period. They assert that many of the barbarian “migrations” were, in fact, real invasions accompanied by extensive killing and destruction.

While acknowledging the formidable intellectual and religious achievements of the era as well as the fact that the east continued to prosper, they claim that, at least in the west, a sophisticated civilization was destroyed, there was a real and substantial drop in the quality of life, and this decline was accompanied by considerable bloodshed and brutality.

While it might seem that the interpretation of late antiquity that speaks of invasion, death, and destruction is utterly incompatible with the one that emphasizes growth, migration, innovation, and creativity, the two may not be as irreconcilable as they appear.

If you are primarily concerned with levels of material prosperity, then the negative interpretation is surely the accurate assessment, but if you are mainly interested in spirituality, then a more positive appraisal of the period is genuinely a more truthful version.

All of these debates about when the classical world ended and the medieval period began—and whether there should be another era termed late antiquity inserted between them—demonstrate much about the way historians conceive of history itself and how it unfolds. There is a natural tendency on the part of human beings, including historians, to want to neatly divide up the past into separate epochs and then list a set of defining characteristics for each one. In the desire to establish distinct historical eras, however, such periodizations often result in simplifications and overgeneralizations.

Additionally, just as it is possible for those with different interests to legitimately come up with diametrically opposite characterizations for the same era, those with other concerns will likely place their temporal

boundaries at dramatically varying points. How historians have divided up the past often reveals more about the era in which they live and the current concerns of that moment in time than it does about the period that they are actually writing about.

READINGS

Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*.

Rousseau, *A Companion to Late Antiquity*.

Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*.

QUESTIONS

1. A time of decline, destruction, loss, and decay or a time of innovation, creativity, change, and transformation: Which of these two rival interpretations of late antiquity do you find most convincing? Defend your choice.
2. When assessing any historical era, which factor do you think is most relevant: political events, economic trends, social changes, religious developments, or something else? Why?

Whichever interpretation of late antiquity one favors, at the end of the 7th century, the Mediterranean world still incorporated a number of recognizable components drawn from older cultures—whether from the classical world, the northern tribes, or eastern civilizations. However, it was also during late antiquity that many important new elements were introduced, including the emergence of the main cultures, borders, and religions of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East.

There are many debates that are unsettled concerning the events of late antiquity; it is perhaps a measure of the importance of this historical era that it has given rise to so many, and such heated, controversies.



ECHOES OF ROME

LECTURE 24

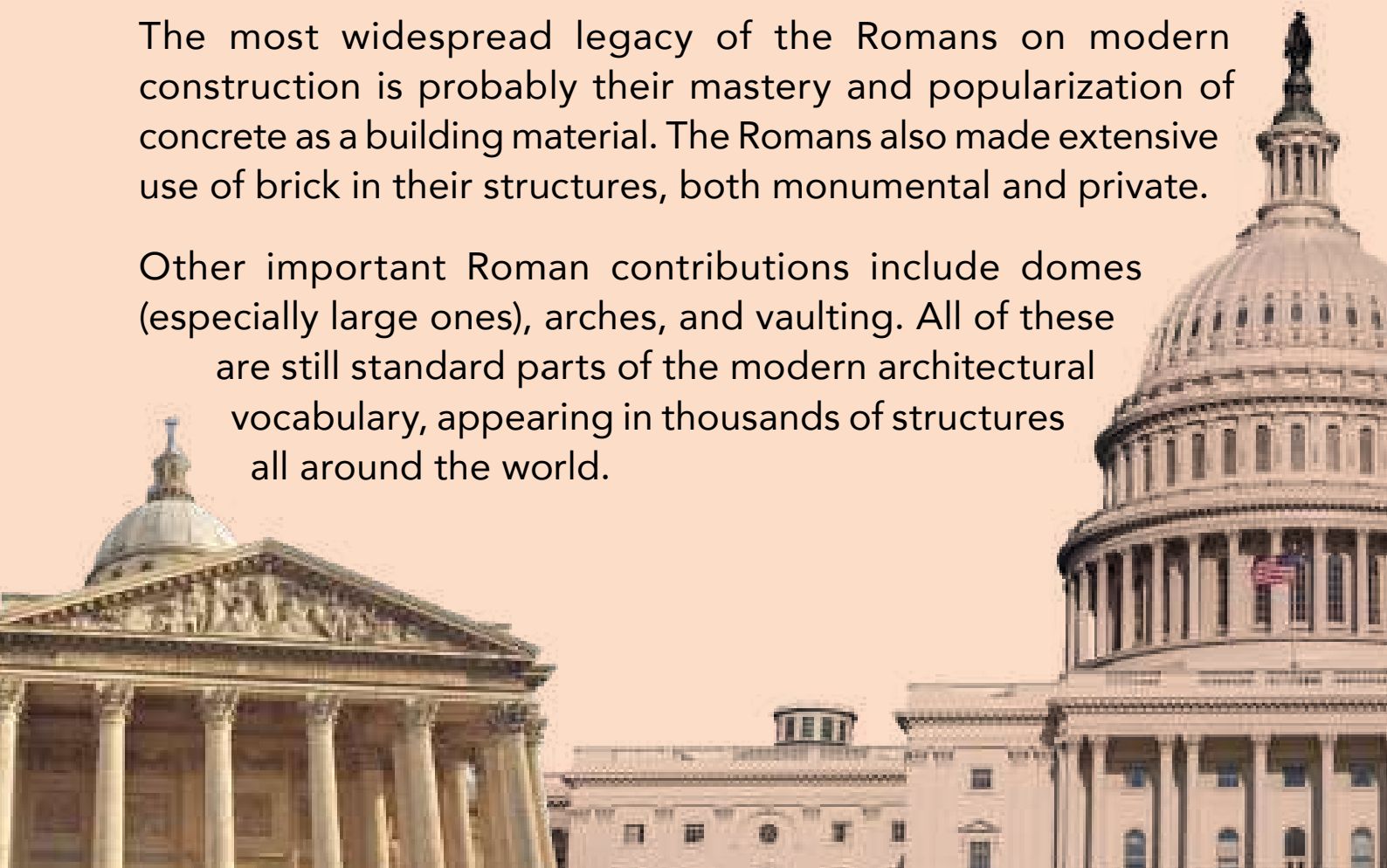
One of the key themes that has run throughout both this course and the Great Course *The Rise of Rome* is the many influences of Rome on the world today. These two courses have already highlighted a number of the myriad ways that our current world and our contemporary culture have been profoundly molded by Roman civilization. However, because the legacy of Rome is so vital to understanding the present, this final lecture will systematically review all of these influences and mention a few additional ones.

The Long Shadow of Rome

The way we communicate, both in speech and writing, is primarily through a system developed by the Romans. Written English employs the Latin alphabet, although the Roman version had only 23 letters, lacking *j*, *u*, and *w*, which were added later. About a third of English words are derived from Latin, and at least another third come from languages that are descended from Latin, most notably French. In the specialized vocabularies of the fields of science, medicine, and law, the percentage of Latin or Latin-derived words is even higher, amounting to 90 percent in the most common estimates.

The most widespread legacy of the Romans on modern construction is probably their mastery and popularization of concrete as a building material. The Romans also made extensive use of brick in their structures, both monumental and private.

Other important Roman contributions include domes (especially large ones), arches, and vaulting. All of these are still standard parts of the modern architectural vocabulary, appearing in thousands of structures all around the world.



The popular image of Roman architecture is a marble structure with columns, and the neoclassical style, which combines Greek and Roman elements, has been widely used, especially for major public edifices, such as government buildings, universities, and museums. Many types of buildings can trace their lineage back to Roman models.

The most famous Roman edifice of all is the Flavian Amphitheater, or the Colosseum, which is the direct inspiration for almost every contemporary sports arena and stadium.

The Pantheon, with its innovative combination of a triangular pediment and classical columns fronting a giant dome, is copied today by innumerable government buildings, from the Capitol in Washington DC to most local state capitols as well as banks, courthouses, and museums.

Roman bath complexes were the ancestors of contemporary spas and bathhouses, featuring hot water pools as well as centralized heating systems that warmed up the floors and walls.

Trajan's Market—a multistory assemblage of more than 150 rooms linked by arcades, internal hallways, and staircases—was the forerunner of contemporary shopping malls and office complexes.

It is not just in the realm of public architecture that the Romans have had a profound influence, but in the private domestic sphere as well. For example, most of Rome's inhabitants lived in apartment buildings that could rise eight or 10 stories high, and the nicer examples are strikingly modern in appearance and organization.

The way in which we regulate and measure time is by systems developed by the Romans. Our 365-day annual calendar, including the names of all the months, is essentially the same as that instituted by Julius Caesar, and dividing the day into 24 hours is also a Roman practice, although their hours varied in length according to the time of year. The Romans loved holidays and festivals, and aspects of many of these were assimilated into their modern counterparts; thus, Christmas incorporates some elements of the Roman Saturnalia festival.



One of the most overt ways in which Rome has shaped the modern world is in the area of politics and government. The United States was founded and designed as a deliberate imitation of the Roman Republic. This is why it possesses such features as a senate, three branches of government, a system of checks and balances, and vetoes—all of which were components of the Roman Republic. The emphasis on citizenship and the participatory role of citizens are based on a Roman paradigm, exemplified by the legendary Roman citizen/soldier/farmer, Cincinnatus. The Founding Fathers were steeped in classical ideas and self-consciously set out to fashion a new Rome.

Like the US Founding Fathers, the instigators of the French Revolution were similarly inspired by an idealized notion of the Roman Republic, and both countries adopted much of their symbolism and terminology from Rome.



Not only the republic has been an influential model, however. The Roman Empire has spawned even more would-be imitators. Again, the very vocabulary has its roots in antiquity; “empire” and “emperor” are derived from the Roman terms “imperium” and “imperator.” Among the more notable emulators of this phase of Roman government were Charlemagne, Napoleon, Victorian Britain, and Mussolini. The Roman Empire has also been a model—sometimes depicted as benevolent, but more commonly as oppressive—in countless works of fiction, ranging from the Galactic Empire in Isaac Asimov’s *Foundation* series of novels to the evil Empire in the *Star Wars* films. In general, Roman history and the Latin language have given rise to a surprising number of terms for absolute rulers, including “prince,” from “princeps;” “duke,” from “dux;” “tsar” and “kaiser,” from “Caesar;” and the word “dictator” itself.

Militaries and governments as diverse as those of Hitler, Napoleon, Russia, the United States, and Mussolini have all adopted the eagle as a symbol, often giving their military units eagle flags or emblems to carry, in direct imitation of the famous eagle standards borne by the Roman legions.



Just as various stages of Roman government have had many followers, the Roman military has been one of the most emulated in all of history. The Roman legions have functioned as the paramount example of a professional fighting force, which many subsequent armies have attempted to copy. The traits of discipline and organization embodied by Rome's legions have also become central concepts for later professional armies. Even the command structure of the legions, with its division between officers and centurions, is mirrored in how most modern armies employ a system of commissioned and noncommissioned officers.

Many of our mass entertainments follow in Rome's footsteps. Not only do our stadiums look like Roman ones, but the whole culture of professional sports teams—with their distinctive colors, fans, and rivalries—recalls the chariot-racing factions of the Circus Maximus. Related phenomena, such as celebrity athletes, a mania for sports statistics, and gambling on athletic events were as familiar to ancient Romans as they are today. When it comes to staging spectacular shows as entertainment and relishing violence in sports, the Romans surpassed anything found in modern culture.

Roman civilization was an urban one, and the cities of the empire presaged many aspects of the modern urban experience. The city of Rome was exceptional because of its unique size—approximately a million inhabitants at its height. As the sole megacity of this scale in the Western world prior to the Industrial Revolution, Rome anticipated many contemporary urban concerns, including overcrowding, traffic congestion, pollution, sanitation, noise, crime, wealth inequity, homelessness, and underemployment.

The city of Rome had to contend with other challenges that still plague cities today, such as frequent and destructive fires and floods, rioting, and public disorder, each of which was particularly problematic due to the scale of the city. Simply providing an adequate quantity of food and water for the capital resulted in the building and maintenance of a colossal infrastructure as well as the collection and long-distance importation of a volume of supplies not equaled for more than a millennium. Some scholars have calculated that Rome's aqueducts provided more water per person than almost any other city in history.

Rome's influence on the field of civil engineering is enormous. The Romans were master builders of infrastructure—for example, connecting the cities of the empire with a network of thousands of miles of carefully graded and constructed roads. Roman bridges, tunnels, harbors, and sewers were marvels of solidity and efficiency, and as testimony to their engineering, many remain standing thousands of years later. Hundreds of cities in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East had their origins as Roman colonies or military camps, and their current street plans often follow those laid down by the Roman surveyors who established them.

There are many modern debates that would not have seemed unfamiliar in the Roman world. The empire spanned three continents, and the peoples that Rome conquered included dozens of distinct ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. It truly was a multicultural empire, and the questions of how and to what degree to assimilate newcomers were urgent ones. One of the secrets to Rome's longevity was its success, for at least several centuries, in walking the line between allowing local cultures to continue practicing their traditional ways of life and compelling the incorporation and Romanization of provincials. The grain dole distributed to Rome's poor citizens has elicited countless comparisons with modern welfare schemes.

The far-reaching intellectual influence of Rome in fields such as literature, art, philosophy, and science form another category in which the Romans' impact is unavoidable. Similarly, aspects of Roman culture are embedded within nearly all facets of our daily lives and habits. The ways in which we dine, are educated, travel, and get married all contain specific elements drawn directly from Roman practices. Even in something as seemingly trivial as superstitions, we emulate the Romans; just as some people today worry about unlucky numbers or carry around lucky charms, so did the Romans. Modern audiences enjoy horror movies, but the Romans also told stories about werewolves and creepy, old, haunted mansions inhabited by chain-rattling ghosts.

Perhaps the two greatest legacies of ancient Rome are law and religion. These are also areas in which that influence is particularly direct and undiluted. Nearly the entire world, except a handful of countries in the Middle East and Africa, use legal systems that are directly or indirectly derived from the Code of Roman Law. In religion, Christianity began in the Roman world and, once it was adopted by the emperors, spread rapidly throughout the empire. Today, about a third of the world's populace are Christian.

READINGS

Aldrete and Aldrete, *The Long Shadow of Antiquity*.
Kallendorf, ed., *A Companion to the Classical Tradition*.

QUESTIONS

1. Of the many ways in which ancient Rome has influenced the modern world, which do you think are the most important and/or wide-ranging?
2. While some Roman sources seem completely familiar, others are shocking in their divergence from modern sensibilities. After everything you have learned in this course, what is your dominant feeling toward the Romans: empathy or otherness? Why?

In language, timekeeping, government, war, architecture, religion, science, literature, philosophy, entertainment, customs, habits, religion, and law, we still walk in the footsteps of the Romans, and we cannot truly understand ourselves unless we comprehend the vital influences of Rome on our modern world.

TIMELINE

c. 753

Foundation of Rome.

c. 753–715

Reign of Romulus, first king of Rome.

c. 753–509

Regal period of Roman history.

509

The Romans expel, the last king of Rome, and establish the republic.

509–30 B.C.

Roman Republican era.

343–290

The Samnites lead the resistance of the Italic tribes to Rome's increasing dominance in Italy.

326

The Romans gain control of Neapolis (Naples).

272

Greeks in Magna Graecia become subject to Rome.

264–241

First Punic War.

BC

240

Livius Andronicus produces both a tragedy and a comedy at the Roman Games.

230

Murder of Roman envoy provokes the First Illyrian War.

218–201

Second Punic War.

216

The Romans are defeated at the Battle of Cannae.

211

The Romans sack the city of Syracuse; following the sack, Greek art begins to arrive in Rome.

200

Date of the performance of the earliest known comedy by Plautus.



160

Terence produces his last comedy.

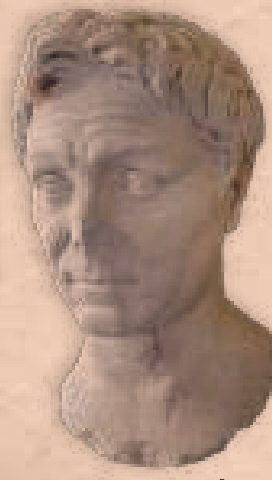
161

Expulsion of philosophers from Rome.

146

Macedonia becomes a Roman province; sack of Corinth; sack of Carthage.

BC



63

Pompey the Great conquers Judea and reduces it to the status of a client kingdom.

55

The first permanent theater is built in Rome.

44

Assassination of Julius Caesar; Corinth is refounded as a Roman colony.

c. 33

Saint Paul is converted to Christianity.

31

Octavian defeats Mark Antony and Cleopatra at Actium; annexation of Egypt as a province.

27

Octavian establishes the principate and takes the name Augustus.

6

Judea is annexed to Rome.

c. 30

Crucifixion of Jesus.

37

Birth of Josephus, Jewish historian.

BC

AD

Early and high imperial period



38

The first recorded outbreak of violence against Jews living in the Roman Empire occurs in Alexandria by Greeks.

6–41

Rome rules Judea through prefects.

41

The Romans appoint Agrippa I king of Judea.

60

Saint Paul arrives in Rome.

64

The first recorded instance of persecution of Christians takes place under Emperor Nero; completion of the temple in Jerusalem.

66

The great Jewish revolt breaks out.

68–9

Following the suicide of Nero, first Galba (murdered), next Otho (committed suicide), and then Vitellius are proclaimed emperor; after the murder of Vitellius, Vespasian becomes emperor and establishes the Flavian dynasty.

70

Destruction of Jerusalem.

73

The Romans end Jewish resistance in the great revolt.

117–38

Under Emperor Hadrian, the Roman Empire reaches its maximum extent.



165

Plague, possibly smallpox, reduces the population of the empire by around 10 percent.

177

Aurelius condones the persecution of Christians in Lyon.

c. 180–190

Apuleius writes the *Metamorphoses*, or *The Golden Ass*.

192

Murder of Emperor Commodus.

193

Accession of Emperor Septimius Severus.

212

Caracalla grants citizenship to all free citizens living within the Roman Empire.

250

Decius orders the first major persecution of Christians.



251

Decius is killed in battle by the Goths.

286

Diocletian establishes the tetrarchy ("rule by four").

293

Diocletian divides the empire into two halves.

302, 304

Diocletian orders the widespread persecution of Christians.



305

Abdication of Diocletian and Maximian.

312

Constantine defeats Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge.

313

The Edict of Milan promulgates a policy of religious freedom.

315

The Arch of Constantine is built.



324

Constantine reunites the empire and becomes sole emperor.

330

Constantine dedicates Constantinople on the site of Byzantium.

Constantinople★
(Istanbul)

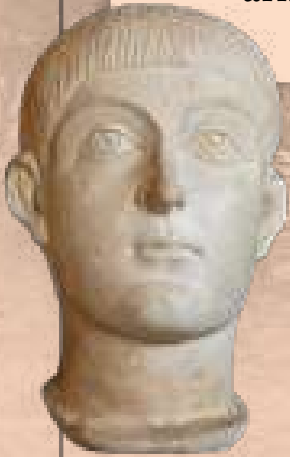
★ Rome

361–363

Reign of the emperor Julian the Apostate.

378

The Goths defeat the eastern Roman army at Hadrianopolis, killing the emperor Valens.



395

Theodosius I abolishes pagan rites; on his death, the Roman Empire splits into two halves; Alaric the Visigoth lays siege to Athens.

402

Honorius makes Ravenna the capital of the western Roman Empire.



410

Alaric the Visigoth sacks Rome.

439

Carthage falls to the Vandals.

455

The Vandals sack Rome.

476

The deposition of Romulus Augustulus presages the fall of the Roman Empire in the west; Odoacer becomes the first barbarian ruler of Italy.

493

Odoacer is murdered by the Ostrogoth Theoderic.

529–534

The codification of Roman law is completed under Justinian.

532

Justinian suppresses the Nika riot.

542

The Justinian plague kills an estimated 25,000,000.

554

Justinian succeeds in retaking Italy.

568

The Lombards enter Italy and recapture territory taken by Justinian.

751

The last exarch of Ravenna is killed by the Lombards.

1204

Sack of Constantinople in the Fourth Crusade.

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